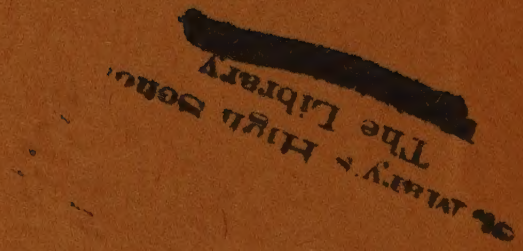

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IN THE JERSEY HILLS

By

MARY V. HILLMANN

St. Mary Regional High School
Library
310 Augusta Street
South Amboy, New Jersey 08879

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TO
MY MOTHER AND FATHER

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IN THE JERSEY HILLS

CHAPTER I

WHITE TOWERS

THERE are places in the world where one may stand and laugh up at the stars and feel, not alone —as some quack philosopher aiming at sensational statement has said—but in close companionship with the myriads of those gone before whose eyes were also raised heavenwards, and in close companionship, too, with God. In such places the sky whether by night or day is forever lifting one up and telling one that all is well, even though sorrow be oppressing the whole earth or deeply searing one's own heart. In places of this sort one catches one's breath at the mystic loveliness of trees, in all seasons, against horizons as varied in their beauty as only the Infinite Designer could conceive them. And though in the "towered structures high" which are also a part of these places there are human beings, and therefore certain allotted portions of inevitable suffering, there is, too, a Presence, saving, inspiring, and adored with reverence and with love—communion with which Presence is like an anointing of the eyes to behold beauty and truth, and an armoring of the spirit, however in itself feeble and faltering, boldly to give battle to whatever of evil stalks abroad in the land. Such places are oases in this pathless and waterless desert of our temporal life, though they are, sadly enough, known only to a few, and at the assertion of their existence, many—

the inexperienced and the blind through material things —smile in bitter unbelief, crying out, "Mirage!" and go stumbling despairingly upon their bewildered and weary journey to the sea.

"That's it!"

The kindly-eyed gentleman leaned forward and peered out through the train window, his fine face alight with interest. At his exclamation, his companion, a girl of perhaps seventeen or eighteen, closed the magazine she had been pretending to read, and fixed a forlorn gaze upon the moving scene. What she saw—set far, far back upon a broad green campus, rich with shrubbery and trees—was a long stretch of whitish buildings, their cupolas and towers rising in symmetrical, yet varied design against the quiet blue of the sky.

"That first building on the lower terrace is Xavier Hall," the man eagerly continued. "Renaissance—isn't it, daughter?"

"Don't know." The girl mumbled the reply through tightening lips, and the line between her eyes grew deeper with her manifest effort to control her tears.

To this struggle for self-possession, however, her father was apparently insensible; at least he abated no whit of his attention to the panorama unfolding before them.

"The administration offices," he went on cordially, "are in that high central building with the gold cross, and away at the other end there, is the chapel. More church than chapel—isn't it?"

"Convent," sang out the conductor, opening the door with that brisk energy of benevolence which characterizes the philanthropic, as who should say, "Well, here we all are at last, and how happy we all should be to be here!"

The gentleman seized the girl's suit-case, and, his tall form erect, strode down the aisle. She followed him, hugging such precious impedimenta as her umbrella, her purse, her tennis-racket, a magazine, and a box of bon-bons. In less than half a minute the two were out upon the station platform, and looking up at the entrance to the college grounds.

"Vines—beautiful vines, and a lovely low stone wall," observed the gentleman. A comprehensive gesture of his long arm indicated the sweep of terrace they were approaching. "And trees! Is that a horse-chestnut, Lou?"

"Don't know," muttered Lou. Nor did she care. Beauties of nature, were they multiplied a thousand-fold, she was convinced, would be powerless to lift her mood to the level of her father's enthusiasm. She loved him, of course, and therefore she was glad that he did not realize just how much pain he was causing her by bringing her to this place. Surreptitiously she brushed a tear from the lapel of her new blue suit, and swallowed what had threatened to be an enormous sob, as they ascended the three stone steps leading to the walk.

"Now this is pretty—exceedingly pretty! See, Louise! When I came here in June, this whole bed at the left was a mass of roses."

The girl turned half-reluctantly toward the flower-beds, and her face brightened ever so little. "There's one still in bloom," she proferred, drawing a finger across a moist eyelid.

"One what? One rose? Yes, yes! To be sure! Just—one—single—rose! Now, who would have thought —ahem!—

"'Tis the last rose o - of sum - mer
Le - eft - bloo - oo-oom - ing alone!"

At her father's spirited and flat intonation of the inevitable lines, Louise was fain to laugh, albeit somewhat

mournfully and in direct opposition to her better judgment and to her fixed resolve.

"There now," he said, and placed a comforting arm strongly round her. "I knew my little girl would feel better when she had made up her mind to. And now we're off! Along this path to the right. What an array of maples! Did you ever see such an arch of foliage, Lou? Isn't it superb?"

"Lovely." But Lou, reverting to her hurt and lonely mood, was staring doggedly at the flagstones; nor did she lift her eyes even once to see, on her right, the clusters of spruce and cedar, the star-leafed maples, and the lindens, and, on her left, the close-cut lawn, fresh and green, leading off to a broad driveway beyond which were glimpses of shrubberied paths, and fields, and the sky. In the first place, who—*who* could care for a college away out here in the country? In the city, there would be people. . . .

Suddenly there in the shaded avenue they stopped, quite spontaneously, though they might have passed on, for the slim, vivid-faced girl in brown, seated for rest apparently, upon her suit-case, only partially blocked the way. She glanced up at them with a pleasant expression in her eyes, and a frank smile that set Lou wondering where she had met its owner before.

"May I have the honor?"

More often than she could remember had Louise devoutly wished that her darling father would discard some of his chivalrous customs. Obviously the girl in brown would be unwilling to have him act the porter for her.

"Oh, no! Please!" She stood up. "It's not really heavy. Only the jam and the oranges and the English dictionary I threw in at the last minute kind of make it seem sort of heavy."

"But, I assure you, I need ballast." Lou's father, with the gentle courtesy of a storied knight, appropriated

the girl's bag. "My daughter's suit-case is heavy, too, and I fancy the heaviest thing in it is Cousin Brenda's currant cake."

"Brenda? Brenda?" repeated the girl in brown as the three set out once more toward the college. "Where have I heard that name? Oh, yes! I recall. It's a lady in a house where my brother Jack visits."

"Is your name Stedman?" The gentleman suddenly checked his swift pace.

"Yes. And you? Why, of course, you're Mr. Maxon! And this is Louise!"

"Jack's sister? Well, I do declare! Elizabeth Stedman!" Mr. Maxon dropped both suit-cases, and proceeded to shake the young lady's hand with a vigor warranted, if prolonged, to effect an irremediable dislocation. "This *is delightful!* Delightful, indeed! Now, isn't this extremely delightful, Louise?"

"Yes. I'm awfully glad we've met."

Though her tone scarcely savored of enthusiasm, Lou was genuinely appreciative of the charm of her new acquaintance—of the face, not too pretty, but piquant and interesting with the interest that intelligence and vitality awaken, and of the smiling mouth—not too small—and of the sunny radiance of kind hazel brown eyes. "She looks," thought Lou, "like the heroine of a story. Only there's more to her than that. There's something—"

"It's providential—providential," pursued Mr. Maxon, while his daughter wished from the depths of her heart that he had kept silent for just one second longer until she had decided upon the nature of that perceptible yet not immediately describable quality of attractiveness in Jack's sister. But that was always the way. Father, and Cousin Brenda, and Aunt Ellie were prone to talk consumedly about everything. With the joys of mere thinking they appeared wholly unacquainted, as witness her father, once more, who was still rattling on. "Jack was wrong after all, Lou. He said you and his sister were

the same height. But Lou has the advantage, Miss Stedman. Lou has the advantage."

"It's her hat that's taller than mine." There was a half glance at the fawn-colored head-gear, brand new, and Cousin Brenda's choice. "But wouldn't you think," Elizabeth added, "that I'd have known you right away? My brother's forever raving about you all."

Mr. Maxon, beaming down upon her, stood balancing himself again with the luggage. "I never should have recognized you. Jack never told us you were so nice and—"

"Oh, *now!*" she laughed the compliment away, with a swift heightening of color that made her all the more charming.

"Cerise!" thought Lou. "No—not cerise, and not pink, nor coral. It's the slightly olive skin that makes it seem—"

"Lou and you will be the best of friends." Having resumed his onward course, Mr. Maxon, buoyed up by his own prophecy, went striding gayly ahead of them.

"Do you know how to get there?" Elizabeth called after him.

"Yes. Turn to your left up here by the road," he cheerily called back.

The girls halted for a second where the avenue is crossed by the driveway, and found themselves facing the chapel, a structure of Oxford brick and of dimensions somewhat parochial, the first of the long sweep of buildings stretching off to the right. Its broad granite steps and its double oaken doorway, wide open, palpably invited them to enter.

"I'd like to go in," murmured Jack's sister. "Would you?"

"No." Though not ungentle, the answer was decisive.

"Well, never mind," said Elizabeth hurriedly. "I can come back later."

"This way!"

They trotted quickly after their guide who was swinging round at the left of the chapel.

"Isn't your father dear?" Elizabeth exclaimed in low enthusiastic tones. "So—so big-hearted! And so tall, too, and fine looking! I don't wonder that Jack's crazy about him!"

"The house on our left is the rectory," called Mr. Maxon over his shoulder.

"And what's this big apartment-looking place with those queer beetly tower things?" Elizabeth's breath almost gave out on the lengthy question for she and Lou were running forward to catch up with him.

"That? Let me see! Oh, yes! The novitiate—where the sisters get their training."

Lou shuddered a little.

"Funny!" murmured her companion. "Not my idea of a novitiate. But, oh, gaze ahead of us—across the road!"

"The greenhouse," announced Mr. Maxon importantly. "I went all through it in the spring."

"What a cute little cottage sort of entrance! Green—and latticed windows! How darling! And red blossoms in the window-boxes! Oh, if they are only geraniums! Don't you *hope* they're geraniums?"

Her ejaculations of delight met with no response from Lou. Round the curve of the road near the greenhouse glided a limousine, and the three pedestrians, following slowly in its wake, passed a space of close-clipped sward and a tennis court, and at length approached the entrance of a long four-storied building, Oxford brick again, of graceful architecture.

"Santa Rita Hall." Mr. Maxon glanced sidewise, with some concern, at his daughter. "An attractive name—don't you think, Lou?"

"Not specially." Her lips trembled pathetically for just a second.

An arm, all friendliness and sympathy, linked hers.

"Blue?" whispered Jack's sister.

"I hate it." Elaboration upon the subject was prohibited by the little choking spasms in her throat.

They walked silently up the steps of the dormitory, and inside, were received by a tall, smiling sister—Sister Angela, Mr. Maxon called her—with ruddy cheeks and glasses insecurely set on a prominent nose. While the girls went to their rooms, the sister remained in the foyer talking to Lou's father, and was still thus occupied when Lou returned. She stood apart from them, waiting, near the newel post of the stairway, and observing, with unreasonable disdain, the scores of her contemporaries and possibly fellow classmates round about, a number of them more or less agitated by the ordeal of bidding farewell to fond parents and guardians. Two hardy bobbed-headed creatures, having come up from a lower floor, babbling the praises of what was evidently a quite recent purchase—a blue pennant, bearing the name of the college in letters of golden yellow—passed her with an almost imperceptible, but certainly an appraising glance. She pretended that she did not see them, the while a horrible fear of them crept over her, for they possessed the cock-sure and aggressive manner of sophomores.

It seemed only a moment later—a dark, confused moment—when she stood out alone on the loggia, watching her father striding away to catch his train, past the tennis court, past the green sward beyond it, and round the corner near the apartment-looking novitiate with its "beetly towers," which hid him wholly from her view. It seemed hours later—though it might have been a brief twenty minutes when, with an uninteresting junior who had introduced herself as Lou's "big sister," she was walking over under more maple trees, and up five terraced brick steps, and through a somewhat gray and forbidding courtyard to the central building for "supper."

At the beginning of that first meal in the big dining-hall, Lou sat in stolid silence, eating nothing and suffer-

ing anguish inexpressible from the hilarious chatter and laughter of what appeared to her to be untold myriads of girls. Wherever she directed her eyes, there were faces of girls—oh, too, too many faces of girls—and they were all smiling—smiling extravagantly. And their remarks were silly—half sentences, vapid and empty, a jargon of meaningless phrases caught up and passed from one to the other. She wished passionately that they would all keep still! She felt that in a moment she must scream at them, "Keep still! Keep still! Keep still! You are all talking too much, and your smiling is hateful! I hate it! Don't you know that life is all wrong?"

"Isn't your name Maxon?" A straight-featured well-set person, eagle-eyed, and in speech utterly staccato, addressed Lou across the table.

"Yes." The monosyllable came, to Lou herself surprisingly enough, in a tone not altogether ungracious.

"Your room's right opposite mine. I went exploring, and examined all the names. Mine's Amy Pasker."

Lou smiled an acknowledgment, and the smile inexplicably brought with it a faint semblance of friendly feeling for all the smiling girls round her, though she made effort to halt there at the outer edge, so to speak, of the penumbra of their camaraderie. Guarding herself against further advance, then, she continued, nevertheless, to smile at the jests tossed from lip to lip and at Amy's none too profound though voluble observations upon her new classmates and upon the college—the latter, in her opinion, absolutely and painfully devoid of those high and lovable qualities which had made glorious *her* preparatory school.

Afterwards, in the brain-clouding exit from the dining room, Louise was conscious that she was smiling still, though she became conscious, too, of a twitching at the corners of her mouth, when in the dusk she went back through the gray courtyard again to Santa Rita Hall. In the cheerfully lighted reception room, however, her

emotions regained their balance, and sitting with several new-comers like herself, a little dazed by the copious talk, and the laughter, and the dancing, and the none too subdued greetings among the "old girls," she gradually grew interested to the extent of wishing herself an initiate to the meaning of their apparently very clever remarks and repartee.

"Well, what do you think of us?" An "old girl," who had evidently been observing her, asked the question.

"I don't know—just yet."

"You're sincere."

"Who's the big stout, fair-haired one with the round face?"

"You mean Little Nell? Nell Rawdon?"

"Is that her name? She's funny—isn't she? I rather like her."

This admission Louise had immediate reason to regret, for the "old girl" called out with an inconsiderateness altogether cruel and callous.

"Nell! I say, Nell! Come over here a minute! Here's a freshman who actually likes you."

The big round-faced girl, to Lou's dismay, ambled over, and sinking down beside her on the settee, drawled, "Really?"

Lou, in heroic endeavor to rise to the occasion, responded in an airy voice like Cousin Brenda's,

"You seem very much at home. Are you a sophomore?"

"A *what?*" Nell's heavy-lidded eyes gazed, sideways, their unmitigated scorn. "I'm a junior. If there's one *faux pas* worse than mistaking a senior for a freshman, it's mistaking a junior for a sophomore. We're the most united class in the college; the sophs are all askew—a perfect rag-bag—about fifty cliques, and as for spirit—" She spoke without energy, and energy, her whole manner implied, would be needful for an adequate description of sophomore short-comings. "You're in our sister class; so you've got to be friendly with us. Are you lonesome?"

At the mere word, Lou found it difficult to swallow. Her voice broke on the answer.

"Not—very."

"Live far away?"

"In New York."

"Good. Lots of girls from New York here. I'm from Vermont. Well, pardon me. I have this dance with Queen Anne. I'll tuck you in bed to-night—that is, if I don't tumble in early myself. I have the strangest constitution. I have to have about ten times as much sleep as other people do."

Little Nell presumably tumbled in early that night. At any rate, she did not arrive to tuck Lou in. Fearing indeed, that the big blonde might keep her promise, Lou herself "tumbled in" shortly before ten, and made vain endeavor to forget the woes of life in slumber. The more she tried, the stronger, the more irresistible grew the urge to get up, dress, and go straight home! She did get up, and, on feverish investigation of the contents of her purse, found therein a time-table which told her that the next train left Convent, going East, at ten-thirty. She counted on her fingers. "Ten-thirty—eleven-thirty —and a half hour for the subway—twelve." No. That would be too late. It is true that the journey by rail and underground might be bravely consummated, but in the city there were long, gruesomely dark blocks to traverse before she would reach her own front door, and, granting the dubious possibility that she would arrive there, the family might be out; Nora, the upstairs maid, would certainly be out, and Hannah might be dozing downstairs in the kitchen, deaf to the sound of the bell. . . . The imagined picture of herself standing fearsomely on the high city stoop in the shadow of the doorway waiting for the family's home-coming sent her, all deprived of resoluteness, back to bed. She must defer action to the morning. The light, which she had not thought of turning off, suddenly grew dim to a point almost of extinction, then brightened again. Perhaps five minutes later, it

quite unceremoniously and completely went out. The semi-darkness—for the moonlight was streaming through the window—had the effect, curiously enough, of directing her anticipations into another and altogether dispiriting groove. Even though she should go home in the morning, her father would, in all probability, insist upon her returning to this college of his choice for her.

This forceful reflection oppressed her like a very weight upon her youthful shoulders, which, indeed, drooped pitiably as she sat there in bed, staring at the bare walls—bare and hard and grim—a too cruel change, if ever there were one, from the dear friendly walls of her own room at home. If there were compensation for the change—if she were where she had wished to be, in that place of glamour dreamed about during her high school years—that place of ivy processions, and daisy chains, and pageants, and all the pleasant and thrilling story-book adjuncts to college life—she might courageously endure even this ghastly, this appalling loneliness! But a "convent college"! Her heart rebelled hotly against the circumstances that had forced her into such an institution. She was "immured"! And for four long years! Could any prospect be more depressing, more utterly forlorn, more irremediably tragic? If only Jack had never met her father, or if only—for she liked Jack—if only Laura had not been so characteristically the hypocrite on that night when Lou's father had definitely put an end to their plans—Aunt Ellie's, Cousin Brenda's, and her own!

She had wandered into the kitchen that evening, she remembered broodingly now, her copy of *Nicholas Nickleby* under her arm, to watch Cousin Brenda make the sauce for the pudding—for Cousin Brenda never wholly trusted the desserts to Hannah—when suddenly they had heard the cheery voice of the master of the household, out in the front hall, speaking in "company tones."

"Who *is* he bringing home to dinner this time?" Cousin Brenda had slapped bowl and spoon on the table and had assumed her favorite brigadier-general attitude —an attitude conducive always to the accentuation of her largeness and height. She was almost as tall as Lou's father. "If it's that Honorable Mrs. Flabby-faced Cartright—"

"Sounds like her," Louise had observed, as a low, rather affected ripple of laughter responded to her father's cordial remarks.

Cousin Brenda, in three stealthy strides, had reached the butler's pantry whither Louise had immediately stumbled after her, giggling unconscionably at the funny spectacle her middle-aged relative presented in her long pink and white striped house-keeper's apron, the front of her coal-black hair done up in variegated curl papers, her black eyes snapping wrathfully, and her large thin-lipped mouth compressed with indignation.

"Aunt Ellie's welcoming her. Just listen—will you?" Cousin Brenda had whispered, giving Lou's arm a fierce squeeze. "Did you ever know Aunt Ellie better? And is that another man's voice?"

"Yes—and he's young." Though Lou's affirmation had been made without the faintest indication of interest, her cousin had wheeled about sharply upon her with,

"How do *you* know, Miss?"

Lou had murmured apologetically that the voice sounded that way—young and cheerful.

"Go upstairs immediately, and get dressed for dinner," her cousin had commanded severely, and dashing back to her pudding sauce, had added, with a nod of her head in emphasis for almost every word, "And mind, Miss, you're not to put on any of your specially nice clothes just because there's a—there's company."

A few moments later, when Lou sat before her dressing-table, with eyes tightly closed—because she had learned experimentally that success in arranging her hair

depended upon blindness to the process—Cousin Brenda had darted in.

"Aren't you ready yet? Are you going to pose before that mirror all night?"

"I have to fix my hair—don't I?"

"It seems to me—" Cousin Brenda, with her long tapering fingers, had begun to untwist her curl-papers—"it seems to me you're more than ordinarily particular."

"Am not! What do I care for old Cartright?" Lou had mechanically stuck the last hair-pin into her straight dark locks.

"Cartright, indeed! Of course, you're not thinking of Mr. Stedman at all! Oh, no!" After this sarcastic thrust, Cousin Brenda had effectually incapacitated herself for further abusive insinuation by inelegantly bracketing the comb in her mouth, meanwhile loosening her yard and a quarter of thick black hair.

"Mr. Stedman? Is that who it is?" Lou's tone had expressed a most casual interest. Unfortunately, however, as she stood dreamily snap-fastening herself into her simple evening frock of blue, she had added, "I like him. I saw him once in the office. He was so good-humored, and polite, and he has such a frank, pleasant smile—"

"Frank! Ha! Ha!" Cousin Brenda's laugh had been elocutionary and ironic, to boot. To give it full and dramatic value, she had removed the comb from her mouth. "He knows on which side his bread is buttered. Who ever heard of a boy only a clerk in a man's office being invited by him home to dinner?"

"He must be nice if Father likes him. He has nice light hair—"

"Fickle!" Cousin Brenda had bent over forwards so that her long mane swept the floor, and had applied the comb in swift, impatient strokes. "All blond men are fickle. And what's more," she had continued, suddenly standing erect, her left hand holding her black locks back

from her face, her right hand brandishing the comb, "What's more, I say, Louise Maxon, Mr. Stedman's a Roman Catholic, and that's enough for *you!*"

"Don't see that it has anything to do with me," Lou had wickedly retorted, as, gloating mildly over having the last word, she walked out of the room.

Downstairs in the hallway, she had maneuvered about for fully three minutes, and finally, through an opening in the portières, had peeped into the library to reconnoiter. Her father, tall and straight, was standing near the fire-place with the Honorable Mrs. Cartright—widow of the late Senator Cartright—who was also tall, and lithe besides, and who possessed as other distinguishing marks of her appearance an enamelish white complexion, a mass of dark brown hair coiled round her head, and protruding eyes of an opaque black brown. Over near the window Jack Stedman, no mean representative of a certain goodly type of American manhood, in the observer's judgment, had been attending with respectful interest to some platitudinous anecdote which dear little Aunt Ellie was recounting in her precise English for his edification.

"Ellie, where's Louise?" Her father had turned suddenly toward the window.

"I'm here." She had made the announcement on a little shy laugh, stepping in between the portières.

In a second, her father had crossed the room to her, had taken her in his arms, had kissed her affectionately, and had drawn her toward the Honorable Mrs. Cartright, to whom Louise, shrinking inwardly from the hard gaze of the black-brown eyes, had held out a lifeless and uncordial hand. Aunt Ellie's voice, sweet and mild as always, had brought relief.

"Oh, yes. You must be presented to my niece—though she undoubtedly feels that she knows you. We all do. My brother talks so much about you."

"This is my little girl—my little girl, Jack." Lou had

been almost ready to cry at the unnecessary gusto with which her father had pronounced the words; and she had resented, too, Jack's smiling down upon her as if she were years and years younger than he. "Where's Cousin Brenda? Doesn't she know I'm home?"

"I'll go see." Louise blushed now to recall the abrupt manner in which she had bolted from the room.

She wondered wearily now, also, what this present month of September would have held for her if Jack, that night at dinner, had not mentioned his sister's intention of going to college in the fall. At his remark, Aunt Ellie's face had brightened.

"Oh, what a coincidence!" she had exclaimed. "Louise is going, too. John, did you hear that? Mr. Stedman's sister is going to college, too, next year."

"Yes, yes." Lou's father had answered, his eyes twinkling. "We've talked about it, Jack and I. Haven't we, Jack? In fact, I've decided—Shall I tell them, Jack? I've decided—ahem!—It will upset your plans, Brenda, perhaps—but I've decided to send Louise to the college Jack's sister is going to attend."

The expression of astonishment upon Cousin Brenda's face had been quite comical.

"But, John," she had protested, "Ellie and I have already selected a college—Louise is registered."

"Louise's mother would be pleased—would approve my choice." It was the head of the house who had spoken. "This college is conducted by sisters. What do you think about it, Mrs. Cartright—Laura?"

The widow of the late Honorable R. T. Cartright had thoughtfully rested her gaze upon a glass of water held in her large, shapely white hand.

"Unquestionably," she had observed, in her deep contralto, "convent schools offer unusual advantages." The company about the table had awaited in silence the conclusion of her deliberately uttered remarks, which were spoken, in truth, in the manner of a catalogue and with

an eye to business. Lou had, with vague discomfort, seen her father lean forward a little and had closely watched the effect on his kindly face as Mrs. Cartright added, glancing toward him with a smile, "And if her mother would have wished it, surely no one should object."

Though Lou's father had beamed with pleasure, she herself, her throat throbbing, had sat back in nameless distress, intuitively divining the absence of altruism in Mrs. Cartright's suave presentation of her point of view. The guest of the evening had seemed to Louise to be playing a game—unfairly.

"And what do you say, Louise?"

"Whatever—whatever you say, of course, Father." Lou had wanted to tell him that she was willing to go to a Hindoo college if he so desired, but that she loathed his friend, Laura, and heartily repudiated any expression of opinion from so detestable a source.

Aunt Ellie, her fine delicate face flushed with pink, a little nervous smile playing upon her lips, had bent her dear pretty white head over her tea-cup in silent embarrassment. She, too, and naturally, was reluctant to entrust the education of her niece to a Catholic institution, whatever its academic standing.

"After all," Cousin Brenda had asserted later in the evening when the guests had departed—Mrs. Cartright under the gallant escortage of her friend and host, "your mother was not a *real* Catholic. I don't remember that she went to services more than two or three times after her marriage."

"Brenda, dear!" Aunt Ellie had gently but hurriedly protested upon noticing her niece's rising color. Lou, indeed, though brought up by these two devoted relatives as an Episcopalian, had derived, nevertheless, from her long talks with Hannah in the kitchen, a quite definite idea of the reproach attached to the name of a "fallen away" Catholic. "It was your mother, Louise, you know,

who had you baptized—by a Roman priest, too. Mr. Reed, you remember, said that it was not necessary to repeat the ceremony when you entered the Episcopalian Church. And I must differ with you, Brenda dear, if you will pardon me. I think Louise's mother was a genuine Roman. She was certainly most particular about having the priest come before she died, and I shall never forget that Reverend Mr. Malory—a Jesuit, Louise—Father Malory, your mother called him. He came several times to visit your mother in her last illness—a quiet, courteous man of ascetic appearance—really, as you and I agreed, Brenda, with all the culture and good breeding of an Anglican divine."

"And he would have Romanized you, too," Cousin Brenda had brusquely contributed, with a toss of her head and a lifting of her black brows, "only I whisked you off to the country where he wasn't able to trace you. Your father, I'm sure, would have been weak enough to consent."

The day subsequent to this review of her early history, Lou's father had handed her a catalogue of the College of Saint Elizabeth, observing as he did so, "I hope my girl isn't disappointed. I want her to be happy."

But Lou had run behind his chair and had taken his dear head—just touched with gray—in both her hands while she swallowed her tears, and had kissed him on the crown of his head where his hair would never stay down, and had given him a little love punch behind his ear in undeniable proof of her high spirits. "You're a good Lou," he had said, drawing her down and kissing her.

Rather than permit him to suffer even the slightest twinge of sadness at sight of the grief overwhelming her, she had gently disengaged herself from the strong and kindly grasp of his hand, and had run off to her room, where, as effectually as she could through eyes half filled with resentful weeping, she had scanned the pages that

all too baldly indicated the tenor of the next four years of her life.

The undesirability of a "convent college" education had haunted all of them—Aunt Ellie, Cousin Brenda, and Louise herself—during the following summer, converting what ought to have been a happy holiday into a season of wretched anticipation and of half apathetic preparation for the victim's departure in the fall. Louise could almost see now Aunt Ellie's delicate hand trembling as it had at their good-bye in the terminal of the D. L. and W. that afternoon of the eighteenth of September. Cousin Brenda's farewell had been a fierce whisper of consoling intent.

"You can come home *often,* and *I'll* see that you'll have some social life."

In the train, after a brief and fruitless attempt at normal conversation, Lou's father had become absorbed in his newspaper, and she had made pretense of reading her magazine. And so the two had ridden in a silence almost unbroken from four-fifteen until their arrival at Convent Station at five.

"And I'm here, sure enough," she moaned to herself now as she sat up in bed in the moonlight, staring at the weird shadows cast upon the unadorned furniture and upon those hard, bare walls of her room. "Four years in a convent! Four years in a convent! Oh, Father," she whispered, covering her face with her hands, while her voice broke with a great sob, "I never, *never* could stand it!"

Someone knocked outside, and she raising her head found breath to call, "Come in!"

It was Jack's sister, a faerie apparition, with the moonlight playing upon her vivid face as she stood hesitating for a moment in the doorway.

"Is this Lou?"

"Yes."

"I thought you'd be frightened about the lights. I

was—sort of. There's only light in the corridors. Isn't that funny?"

Louise murmured her agreement to this description of the circumstance.

"You're not lonesome still—are you? I thought, when I left you, you seemed sort of blue—kind of wistful-like."

"I don't know whether I'm lonely or not, but—I hate it!"

"Oh, yes, you *are* lonesome!" Elizabeth came swiftly over, and slipped down on her knees beside the bed. "You'll feel better tomorrow. Honest! And we're going to be friends, I hope. Jack hoped so, too."

Louise wrestled with her ill humor, increasingly aware of an obligation to control it. She was, moreover, attracted by the elfish prettiness of Jack's sister, kneeling there in the moonlight, her soft wavy hair, loosened for the night, all falling about her upturned face and her shoulders.

"Aren't we going to be friends?"

The word had a novel sound to Lou. She had never really had any friends outside of the family—that is, her father, Aunt Ellie, Cousin Brenda, and, of course, Hannah—for the girls at high school had been merely acquaintances—acquaintances upon whom Cousin Brenda had frequently frowned—and the girls whom one met elsewhere through the formalities of social exchange—well, one met them and forgot them. That was all. Of course, she had read about friends in books. There were dear Tommy Traddles and David—who seemed almost her brother—in *David Copperfield,* and Jonathan and David in the Bible, and—

"Aren't we, Lou?" Elizabeth was sitting up on the bed now, with Lou's hands held forcibly and warmly in hers, looking straight into Lou's eyes, and smiling irresistibly. "Say 'Yes,'" she laughed.

"I don't know."

"Oh, take a chance," urged Elizabeth, laughing still. "I'm an adventurer. You be one, too. Are you going to say 'Yes'?"

"Well, maybe—"

"Oh, surely, surely, *surely!* It's queer," she went on contemplatively, "that we did meet—and Jack knowing your father, and all. Jack's wonderful. I'm crazy about him. And I have a little sister and some more brothers—and they're wonderful! I almost died leaving my father and mother. They're darling!" She continued her happy and inoffensive eulogy of the family until Louise was stirred to emulation.

"I'm glad you met Father," she began haltingly. "He and I are such—I mean we always have been chums." She tried to blot from her mind's eye the image of a woman tall and lithe, with masses of dark brown hair coiled about her head. "He's awfully nice. On Valentine's Day he always sends me—sends me roses—" She gulped pathetically at the recollection—"red roses. He did *last* year." This final clause she uttered in refutation of her own subconscious argument that her comradeship with her father would eventually wane and perhaps die should his devotion to Mrs. Cartright persist.

"Red roses? How lovely! And how dear of him—on Saint Valentine's Day!"

For an hour or more they prolonged, in discreetly subdued voices, this exchange of golden confidences until a wave of sleepiness at length gave signal to Elizabeth of the advisability of retreating for needed rest to her own unadorned college room.

"Maybe it's against the rules to be at large so late anyway," she said. "So, goodnight." An impetuous hug quite took Lou's breath away, and, in an instant, her visitor had sprung nimbly from the bed.

"'Goodnight, goodnight, goodnight,'
Sings the night-bird in the dell."

She stepped lightly, rhythmically across the floor to the half whispered tune, turned, made a deep curtsy in the doorway, and with a pretty gesture of farewell, disappeared.

For several moments Louise sat up, rapturously staring after her.

"She's sweet! There's something about her that I like! What is it? I wonder what Aunt Ellie and Cousin Brenda would think!" She wrinkled her brow in a brief second's cogitation upon their possible judgment, but forgot them almost instantaneously in the more vital appeal of her recent guest. "An adventurer! I like that, and the friends part, too." Friends? To be friends? How marvelous! The very word itself opened up a long magic vista of new happinesses. She slid down under the bed-clothes. A person might not be lonely, perhaps, if she could dance through college hand in hand with Elizabeth! "If I should go home to-morrow—" The idea was the last to frame itself in Lou's mind before she fell asleep—"I hope I'll see her before I go. If I *should* go. . . ."

CHAPTER II

ARTISTS THREE

IT was a day in October, a little over a week after the initiation party. Elizabeth stood out near the edge of that space of lawn, popularly known as the "plateau," fronting Santa Maria Hall. The plateau, through its screen of oaks, tall and slim, and burdened now with full boughs of rich, wine-colored leaves, offered the best prospect of the wide and beautiful Valley of the Passaic. But Elizabeth had her back to the valley. In fact, she was resting her slim self against one of the tall slim oaks, nibbling casually at the corner of a "theme" paper, her feet pressed firmly against the grass, and her eyes set critically upon the building before her. On first hearing its name, she had anticipated seeing at least a reflection of Spanish feeling in its architecture, and, in jocose mood, fancied, for her future delight, the discovery, somewhere on the campus, of a related "Pinta" and a "Nina." Of Spanish influence she had eventually detected none—though she was really far from an authority on the subject—in the architecture of Santa Maria Hall. "Saint Mary," she thought, would unarguably have been a more appropriate title for what to her eyes—and she was probably correct in her judgment—appeared to be a foreshortened though attractive structure of near-English Gothic with sensible American windows. Elizabeth's present scrutiny of the architectural points of the building, however, had no reference to its title, nor to its suitability of design for educational purposes. She was wrinkling her eyebrows—and nice, deli-

cately drawn eyebrows they were—in serious consideration of an idea foreign to any which might conceivably have engaged the mind of the man responsible for the four-storied façade fixed there flat against a turquoise sky. For that subdued red-violet frontage, with its gray stone trim, its rounded towers enclosing a balcony between them, its picturesque doors opening into the towers on the first story, and its windows catching with their shining panes the color and light of the blue sky, held for her all the glamour, all the irresistible enchantment of stage scenery. It was to her nothing more and nothing less than a painted "back drop" with the balcony built on where one might effectively appear as a medieval damsel clad in tapestried garb or cloth of gold, strings of pearls about one's throat and glistening in one's braided hair. No more ideal setting had she ever beheld for that lovely thing that people, histrionically inclined, talk about with bated breath and glowing eyes, yet never satisfactorily achieve, namely, an outdoor play.

She whispered the words in voice thrilled and exalted. "An outdoor play! And soldiers with halberks or whatever you call them, sallying from the doors!"

As a matter of fact, from one of the doors at this moment there sallied forth a crowd of freshmen, perky-chinned, most of them, and four or five attempting an athletic stride as befitting their collegiate status. Most of them ran or walked round the corner of the building in a direction across the plateau toward O'Connor Hall, or to Santa Rita down the hill. Elizabeth, sighting Lou, hastened to join her.

"I have something to tell you. Come for a tramp."

With Elizabeth's friendly arm about her shoulders, Louise was nothing loth to leave the throng.

"Let's run!" Elizabeth was in high spirits.

They set out on a race down through the woodland at the left of the hall, and out onto the road, then trespassed gayly across the Morris County Golf Club links, and only

stopped for breath on reaching a meadow lying to their right along the club driveway. Here they tumbled down upon the long silky grass to rest.

"It's wonderful!" panted Elizabeth. "Isn't it wonderful, Lou?"

"Yes," Lou agreed, smiling her appreciation of things in general, but, for rhapsodical expression, searching the limited sources of her speech in vain.

"They say it's more wonderful in the spring," breathed Elizabeth. The meadow was bordered with glorious masses of sunlit sumac, crimson and russet green, backed by the pale yellow foliage of ash trees, and by maples just turning scarlet, and by dark oaks and tawny hickories festooned, here and there, with vivid red Virginia creeper. "I wish I were an artist."

"I heard someone say that you were one—a dramatic artist."

"Since initiation? That's just what I wanted to talk to you about."

"Nell Rawdon said the sophomores were furious, because, when they asked you to act, they had no idea that you could."

Elizabeth chuckled contentedly. No one had enjoyed more than she on that night of their testing, the dismay of those upperclassmen at her clever impersonations of student celebrities.

"I was glad for the sake of our class that I could do it. Haven't we a great crowd of girls, Lou?"

"Great!"

"Knockout!"

They sat in silence for some time, meditating the merits of that unrivaled congregation of beauty, nobility, and intellectuality, known on the campus—though regrettably not to the world—as the Freshman Class. At length Elizabeth turned to Lou.

"What did you get on your description?" She gently appropriated Lou's paper, having tossed her own, marked

D, to the ground beside her. "*A*? Whew! How do you do it? May I read it?"

During that perusal of her impressionistic sketch of the valley's perennially changing but ever delightful moods, Louise, head thrown back, hands in the soft silky grass, stared blushingly up at the white angel clouds in the high blue heavens above her. A laudatory criticism of the composition from the "English 1A" instructor she had received with mild emotions of pleasure, but now, a thrill of pure joy was hers when Elizabeth, returning the paper, exclaimed,

"Great! Wonderful! How *do* you do it? *You're* an artist—a literary artist!"

Lou, happily smiling, but still contemplating the angel clouds, essayed a change of subject. "What was the big thing you were going to tell me?"

"If I could write like that, I'd write a book."

Lou gave a little startled jerk, as from an electric shock, at praise so unexpectedly superlative. "What was the big thing you were going to tell me?" she repeated.

"I really would! No joking!"

"Please, Bet!"

"Oh, all right. It's this. The president of the dramatic association said she was sure I could make it. Freshman candidates are going to give *Everyman* as a try-out, and—and, oh, Louie!—I'm to have the leading part!"

The angel clouds, unnoticed now, drifted slowly away across the blue sky. Louise was gazing in honest congratulation at the aspirant to histrionic glory.

"I'm *so* glad, Bet!"

"And I handed in your name—"

"I couldn't!"

"You can. You can be *Prologue*. There isn't much to say—just those lines at the beginning. I'm wild to begin. And I know you're going to be fine—"

"I really couldn't!"

"Of course, you can. There's nothing to it. You just feel the part, and forget the audience—No—not quite that. You don't forget the audience—Oh, I don't know how to explain it!"

"You love it."

"Mad about it." Elizabeth buried her face in the long grass, but sat up almost immediately, sputtering and grimacing, and threatened with a fit of sneezing. "It's dusty!" Discomfort, however, suddenly gave place to exaltation. "Look!" she pointed across the meadow. "Do you see? The red dogwood berries on the edge of the wood! Let's get some!"

They raced over, and with intermittent expressions of doubt regarding the lawful character of their achievement, broke off a quantity of the fullest branches.

"Dogwood's good luck," declared Elizabeth hugging closely her share of the spoils. "Something nice is going to happen. Not right away, of course. But something." She paused a few seconds, then sighed. "French the next hour. S'pose we'd better be getting back."

Slowly, reluctantly, they retraced their steps over the cool soft grass and up the slope to the golf links, out over the road, and in through the swinging gate to the college campus. At the foot of the woodland path leading up to Santa Maria Hall, the nice thing happened. They met that remote and lovely senior—hitherto worshiped from afar—whom, on Lou's first night at college, the adynamic Nell Rawdon had called Queen Anne. She was carrying a little camp stool in one hand, with a paint box under her arm, and with the other hand—oh, so exquisitely white and well molded—was holding out before her a small pochade in oil showing a group of birch trees bending over a silvery green pond.

"May we help you?" Elizabeth's daring was a thing incessantly to admire, though one would scarcely progress to imitation of it.

"Thank you immensely." The reply came in even

tones as Queen Anne permitted them to relieve her of her camp-stool and paint-box. She had a refined, attractive face, with an enviable ivory complexion, fluffy dark hair drawn back into a Grecian knot, a well-shaped mouth, and a perfectly modeled nose, now slightly daubed on one side with yellow paint. "I've been stealing a bit of the Morris County landscape," she proffered, and cast a glance, half critical and wholly affectionate at her white birches.

"Isn't that *wonderful!*" Elizabeth's accentuation of her accustomed formula of praise bespoke an exceptional degree of admiration. "Are you an artist?"

"Oh, I'm just beginning," murmured Queen Anne, coloring ever so slightly with pleasure at Elizabeth's undisguised enthusiasm. "I do this for practice. When I get my degree, I'm going to study landscape painting abroad, and perhaps some day I'll do something great."

Louise perceived a kindred spirit near. "Will you—will you do illustrations?" she was surprised to hear herself ask.

"Illustrations?"

"For books."

"I haven't quite decided." The somber eyes gazed off into the distance. "You know," she went on weightily, "art is long."

At the top of the hill, where they were obliged to part from her, she graciously received from them her little camp-stool and her paint-box.

"And those beautiful dogwood branches? Will you bring them to the classroom?"

"Won't you—won't you take them?" Elizabeth, stammering over the words, blushingly held out her treasure. Louise followed suit. "Can you carry them?"

"How perfectly lovely!" Queen Anne—paint-box and campstool in one hand, pochade in the other—gracefully encircled the leafy offering with her Naiad arms. "They will be marvelous for design! You *are* dears!"

They watched her go round the corner of the building, and then, all a-thrill at this piece of indubitably good luck which the dogwood had brought them, hurried in and up to their French lecture. With the vision of Anne before their eyes, however, it was tremendously difficult, almost impossible to realize that studies, lectures, verbs, classroom decorum, were an integral part of college life. The instructor spoke in French—the "direct method." A creditable number of her pupils leaned forward with harassed expressions of concentration, nobly endeavoring to translate every word, the while bitter remorse gnawed at them for their cursory attention to the conversational aspects of the language in their required three years of it in preparatory school. But the majority sat back, more or less pleased at the sound of the historic tongue spoken by a native, yet entirely indisposed to overwork their brains or auditory nerves accustomed, as they were, only to American speech. Louise, for her part, endeavored to key herself up to the obligations of the task by desperately gripping her fountain pen. Spoken French to her was almost unintelligible. To understand it at all, she must see it in print, black words on a white ground. She glanced over at Elizabeth. That energetic person was in the act of fluently penning a note of high importance, a note, as Louise learned when, by rapid transit of several obliging hands, it had reached her, not precisely indebted for its inspiration to the instructor's glowing utterances.

"Isn't she darling?" it said. "Let's try to meet her again."

Lou scribbled a line on the paper and sent it back.

"Maybe she'll think we're pushing."

Elizabeth wrote a rejoinder.

"You don't know human nature. She'll be charmed."

If not charmed, Anne was charming that evening when, apparently by accident, they strolled toward her, as she stood, just where Seton Drive turns to go down

the hill to the villa, looking dreamily about her and furnishing the colorful autumn landscape with a center of interest enchanting beyond words to convey.

"Hello," she said, in entirely human tones, smiling cordially at them.

"Good evening, Miss Royce," replied Elizabeth. They had learned her last name from a sophomore in the French class.

"Oh, call me Anne," she laughed, and her laugh gratifyingly had the low, musical quality befitting her classic style. "Isn't it heavenly out now?"

"Great!" Elizabeth agreed, and realized instantly and with a sickening sensation around her heart, the crudeness of her commentary.

As for Lou, words, even interjections eluded her. The magic atmosphere of that October evening held her utterly in thrall. The trees shimmering in the dusk, their browns and ochres, their crimsons and shadowed greens subdued to a haunting harmony of color, a bewitching melody of tones, tender and tragic, seemed living things speaking a silent mystic language which her heart only half understood. What if, as she had planned that night of her arrival at college, she had really gone home! What if she had yielded to that desperate mood of loneliness and disappointment! All this—and now subconscious conviction, though she would not thus have expressed the idea, called out for it in the design of her life—all this she would have missed, this divine October, the buildings transformed by the dusk into a very Camelot with towers and cupolas darkening against the violet and gold of the sky, and Elizabeth, and the other girls, yes—and Anne.

At eight that night, still with exalted soul meditating the happy subject, Louise sitting alone in her room, was interrupted by Elizabeth.

"Hurry, Pollywog. We'll be late. The rest have gone over to the auditorium."

"Why 'Pollywog'?"

"Don't you like it? I meant 'Prologue.'" The brown eyes twinkled with sudden humor.

"You did not. I suppose I am pollywoggish." She said it with a rueful smile and a swift backward mental glance over her upbringing under the tutelage of Cousin Brenda and Aunt Ellie, which had made her a trifle less mature than the majority of her co-evals here at college.

"Not a bit! You're an old dear!" And Elizabeth, clasping both of Lou's hands, forced her to rise, and to the abundant accompaniment of stimulating ejaculations and arguments against her diffidence, led her out from the safe precincts of her room and over to the public ordeal of practice for the freshman try-outs in Xavier Hall.

Lou soon learned, however, that at general rehearsals, *Prologue* was not excessively in demand. In isolation, therefore, satisfactory on the whole to her, she sat night after night in the third row of the big hall, observing and silently criticizing the endeavors of her aspiring classmates, a really promising group, for the most part, intensely eager, and, in the opinion of their audience of one, rather pitiably so. For why should people want to act? Herself, she loathed the idea. If she should be admitted to the association, she would ask to be nominated for the play-reading committee. She would never, never appear in a rôle! Acting was silly, humiliating! Yes, for her! But, oh, not for Elizabeth! Elizabeth was born for it. From the very outset she lived in her part.

"That little Stedman will be admitted." Lou was delighted to overhear this remark fall from the infallible lips of Margaret Somers, president of the association. "She certainly gives evidence of talent."

Regrettably, however—and the fact more or less troubled the peace of her friends and classmates—she also gave evidence, while the *Everyman* practice was in

progress, of a lofty disdain for regular studies. Even the freshman president's officially solemn remonstrances had met with no other result than an affectionate exhortation to wait till the play was over and a promise to "make up every bit of work" neglected because of rehearsals.

"Can't you persuade her to do, say, a modicum—I mean enough to give the right impression to the instructors—to keep within the pale, so to speak?" Nell Rawdon addressed Lou on the subject one evening in late October, and Nell's manifestation of interest in the situation was proof indisputable of its precarious character.

They had met in the corridor outside Elizabeth's door. Through the open transom, they could hear her inside repeating the lines of the play to herself.

"I've tried my best," Lou replied with deep concern. "She's just ignoring Latin and mathematics, and, as for English, I'm sure Sister Margaret meant Bet when she said she was going to drop some remiss people from the course. Can't you think of any way of forcing her to study, Nell?"

"We might speak to Sister Angela."

"Nell!"

"Don't worry. I really have no such intention. How about Anne?"

"The very one!"

Lou hurried off immediately in search of Anne, and having found her, urgently requested her to use the influence which she had undoubtedly begun to wield over her two freshman admirers, for the reform of that one of them now gone quite stage-struck, quite "crazy mad," to quote Amy Pasker, over the play. Anne responded agreeably, and listened with the detached, professional air of the physician to Lou's nervous exposition of the symptoms of the case as the two returned along the corridor to the patient's room.

"If you could induce her to do some theme work even. She's omitted three themes already, and there's a long paper due two days before the play, and I know she hasn't written a word of it, and the rest of us have almost finished."

"Come in!" cheerily called Elizabeth when the two self-appointed monitors knocked at her door. She was seated on the floor in a soft silky Japanese kimono of blue and yellow, her pretty golden brown head bent earnestly over a beribboned mandolin. "I'm learning to play the lute," she proffered without so much as glancing up at her visitors. "It's the peskiest thing. But I have to do it for those opening lines, you know."

"Elizabeth," began Anne in her queenliest voice, while Lou stood diffidently nearby, "we've come to talk seriously to you about a very important matter."

"You have! You two?" she laughed, raising her head so that the soft gleam of the shaded lamp fell full upon her flushed cheeks. "Well, go ahead, dears—so long as you don't interfere with my present ambitions."

"We don't wish to interfere with them," Anne went on quietly. "But we feel—well, we know that you're away behind in your work—"

"Yes?" Though Elizabeth's tone was encouraging, a mischievous smile played about her lips and stole out through her half-closed eyes, as, with head on one side, like a naughty blue-bird, she waited for Anne's peroration.

"Well—now—" said Anne, faltering slightly through awareness of the unpleasing character of her mission—"Louise and I should like to know what you're going to do about it. What, for example, do you propose to do about that long paper for English 1—that paper for Sister Margaret?"

"'Wouldst thou wit?'" the offender asked gayly, springing to her feet and striking the pose she was accustomed to assume for that speech at rehearsals.

"Yes," answered Anne coolly. "I would 'wit.'"

"Then 'wit,' good Felawshipe, that I propose to do nothing," Elizabeth blithely replied.

"Then 'wit' that you'll be dropped from the course." Anne evinced not an iota of sympathy with the culprit's wayward mood.

"Dropped?"

"Yes, dropped. When Sister Margaret says a thing, she means it."

> "'Ah, wretched caitiff, whither shall I flee,
> That I may 'scape this endless misery?'"

Elizabeth staggered to the foot of the bed, and stood there, her hand pressed to her forehead, an embodiment of utter despair.

Lou began giggling. She liked this extemporaneous performance. She had often wished, indeed, that she might emulate Elizabeth in such exhibitions of talent. Anne, however, remained steadfast to her high purpose.

"Elizabeth," she remarked, carving each word as was noticeably her wont on ceremonial occasions, "you know this is not right. You are only injuring yourself."

"Oh, you platitudes!" murmured Elizabeth, retaining still her pose at the foot of the bed.

Addressed to a person of Anne's indisputably exquisite appearance and manners, this exclamation was in the nature of a shocking irreverence. It implied, moreover, an unflattering estimate of her mentality and of her powers of expression. She blushed a faint pink, but continued calmly.

"If you're dropped, you'll have to repeat the course next year, and, besides, you will have established for yourself a distinctly unenviable reputation with the freshman instructors." The slim figure in the soft blue kimono remained obdurately static. "But I see," concluded Anne, still possessing her regal soul in outward quiet, "it's use-

less to talk to you. Louise, come on down to my room."

As both monitors evidenced an intention of leaving, the undutiful one flung herself before them, and stood with her back to the door.

> "'Wouldst thou forsake me in mine utmost need,
> Good Felaweshipe?'"

she cried. "Honest and true," she added half laughingly and half in earnest, "I'm withering away with worry about that English. If I could do it—"

"You could if you employed a little will power," Anne somewhat curtly interrupted. "Please let me pass. I can't waste any more time."

Dignity inimitable marked her going forth. But Lou, at a secret signal from Elizabeth, stayed behind.

"Score one *pour moi,*" she whispered with the look of a conqueror in her eye.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," she returned, lifting a hand high and gazing rapturously at the picture molding, "'Give me liberty, or give me death.' I haven't felt quite free since the dogwood day. In fact," she went on, resuming a normal tone and attitude, "I have been and still am a silly fool over Anne. You should have brought Amy Pasker in to convert me. If she had done the deed, I shouldn't have felt humiliated, as I certainly should feel if Anne had done it."

"What are you talking about, Bet?"

"True. My speech lacks clearness, as it were. You see, it's this way: I get sort of mad at Anne because she sort of thinks she can influence my goings and comings because I like her—which I do, but just the same I want to be free. Besides," she asked walking over to the mirror where she stood arranging on her pretty head the jaunty wine-colored toque belonging to her *Everyman* costume, "don't you think she's a little unimaginative

for an artist? Now, I'm almost positive that I shan't be dropped. Everyone knows that Sister Margaret's bark is worse than her bite. After *Everyman,* I intend to throw myself on her mercy and work like a galley slave for the rest of the year. But, in the meanwhile, it's absolutely impossible for me to descend to such—such—What's the word?—oh, yes—such trivialities as 'themes.' I've got to get into the dramatic association, and just now the play's the one and only thing. What do you think?"

"Well," Louise weakly responded, "perhaps you're right. Everyone doesn't understand about art."

The seventh of November was the date set for the play, and for a week before it, nothing else in the wide universe appeared to count as of any worth with those freshmen involved in the effort. All their wishes and prayers, and the visions of their imaginations were focused in anticipation upon the printed announcements —insignificant to look upon, but, if acquired, forever to be treasured in memory books—which would inform them, a morning or two after the try-outs, of their hard-earned and sublime prerogative, membership in the dramatic association—"Quips and Cues" it happened to be called at the time, though its name was liable to radical change at the heavy process of "reorganization" which the society underwent, apparently almost as an imperative necessity, each year. As a result of this concentration upon the drama and condescension toward—or in many cases superiority to—things academic, not a few of the aspirants fell into disfavor with the instructors. In fact, the dramatic association *in toto* was temporarily looked at askance as a demoralizing factor in the institution. But this point of view, annual also in its outcropping, was accepted by the delinquents for what it appeared to be, an ephemeral phenomenon which needs must perish in the blaze of glory destined to be theirs on the night of the play. Of all the branded, none was so guilt-laden as Elizabeth, though up to the evening of

the performance she wore her stigma lightly. That evening, just before curtain time, she summoned Louise from the dressing room into the hall, exhibiting every evidence of fear, craven and absolute.

"It's all over with me," she whispered in awe-stricken accents. "I wish I had listened to Anne. I just met Sister Margaret in the corridor, and she gave me the freezingest bow you ever saw. I almost melted away on the spot—because, of course, I didn't hand in that long paper, and maybe after all she *is* going to drop me from the course; and if she does, Mother will feel terrible, and—well, I'll just about die, and—"

In the dressing room a bell rang, the signal for the beginning of the play. With the rest of the troupe, the two friends hurried up the rear stairway to the stage. Louise was the first to go out before the audience. She delivered her prologue correctly, conscientiously, and with a tremulousness of expression far beyond that demanded by the most emotional of interpretations. Then, according to instructions, with folded arms, she walked sedately down from the proscenium to a seat in the first row, where, to her immense embarrassment, she found herself next to her English instructor.

"Good, Louise. Very good." Even in the dim light Louise perceived that Sister's smile was designedly encouraging.

"I don't think so." Lou's ears were burning, and she was conscious of a feeling of mortification. "I can't use my voice well."

"But you can use your pen well. You handed in a very readable short story."

"Did I really?" Up from her momentary despondency rose Lou immediately, to the very crest of the proverbial wave of happiness.

Her English instructor pursued the subject with genuine understanding.

"You enjoy writing. Don't you?"

"I—I think so. Yes, I do. I love it. Oh, Sister, do you suppose I ever *could* write if I tried?"

"I'm sure you could. You have an aptitude for writing as marked as—well, as marked as Miss Stedman's aptitude for dramatics."

Lou sat back as one in a dream. She only half followed the play, only vaguely saw Elizabeth cross the stage from left to center where she was stopped by Amy Pasker, a quite hideously garbed and skull-faced Death; only heard as from a great distance Elizabeth's voice, as, a tragic picture of distress, she sat on the steps leading up to the open grave.

> "'Alas, I may well weep with sighs deep,
> Now have I no manner of company
> To help me in my journey and me to keep,
> And also my writing is but unready.
> How shall I do now for to excuse me?'"

Her writing? Yes, her writing was unready, and that was too bad. But Lou's own writing—that would be ready some day, some day far off in the future. Some distant glorious day. And, oh, the joy of it! Oh, the happiness of—

An anguished voice dispelled her ecstasy.

> "'My Good Deeds, where be you?'"

To this piteous outcry of poor Everyman, Good Deeds, *alias* Mitzie Kumf, most wan and tiny of the freshmen, hidden in a curtained alcove up right, responded quaveringly,

> "'Here I lie cold in the ground;
> Thy sins have me sore bound
> That I cannot stir.'"

Louise stole a glance at Sister Margaret. The latter's eyes were fixed intently upon Elizabeth.

"Isn't she wonderful?" Lou ventured to ask.

"Gifted—certainly," Sister replied, nodding her head in emphasis of her statement. "Picturesque, too, tonight."

"The first time I saw her," whispered Lou, amazed at her own burst of confidence, "I thought she looked like a girl in a story."

"Yes?"

"She'd make a good heroine—"

She did not finish the sentence; she could not. For in the very framing of the words, she had been suddenly and overwhelmingly inspired with a magnificent, a dazzling idea! Thenceforward, to all appearances enraptured by the play, she followed breathlessly, with purpose definite and high, Elizabeth's every syllable, every look, every gesture.

The scene with Confession and Knowledge brought the action to its climax. When from the former, Everyman had tremblingly received the scourge with which he was to chastise himself for his sins, Knowledge, stately and kind in her religious garb, removed his cloak. Kneeling there in white silk tunic, a gayly striped scarf about her slim waist, her soft golden brown hair parted in the middle and tucked up in Medieval fashion close to her head and ears, her big beautiful eyes gazing fearfully at the instrument of expiation held aloft in one delicate hand, Elizabeth presented a picture to Lou inexpressibly appealing.

"With illustrations!" This mental commentary was closely related to the destined product of her recent inspiration.

> "'Thanked be God for His gracious work,
> For now will I my penance begin.
> This hath rejoiced and lightened my heart,
> Though the knots be painful and hard within.'"

The tears started to Lou's eyes. She wished, almost

resentfully, for a second, that Elizabeth would not be so real!

"'Hear my clamorous complaint, though late it be,
Receive my prayers, unworthy in this heavy life.'"

Knowledge and Confession, at the end of this supplication, conducted Everyman out to receive the last Sacraments. One heard in the distance the Mass bell and the glad hymnody of many voices. At length she came forth again, in long white robe, her soft hair making a halo about her face, and her eyes luminous with spiritual love. With gaze riveted upon the cross which she held high before her, she led the procession of Good Deeds, Knowledge, Strength, Discretion, Beauty, and Five Wits, from the stage and proscenium down the center aisle of the auditorium, across the back and up again, while still from a distance were wafted sacred melodies of joy and exultation. On her return to the stage, when she had mounted the platform and stood on the edge of the grave preparatory to her descent into it, she gave indications of actual fatigue, appearing, indeed, quite ready to faint.

"Dear! I hope she doesn't fall into it!" exclaimed Lou. "See how white she is!"

"Yes!" Sister Margaret said with some concern. "What's the matter?"

Pain, grief, and deep contrition were written upon Elizabeth's countenance. Her prayer seemed the real cry of a soul in agony.

"'Have mercy on me, God most mighty,
And stand by me, thou mother and maid, Holy Mary!'"

Good Deeds, revived in the form of the athletically built Evelyn Parker, made comforting answer.

"'Fear not; I will speak for thee.'"

Elizabeth hesitated, and then, to Lou's astonishment, directed a long appealing gaze toward Sister Margaret. Sister put her hand over her eyes and smiled at some amusing idea of her own. Then,

"What did she mean by that?" she asked Louise.

"She meant—I think she meant—" false friend, indeed, would she have been to let this opportunity escape her—"she meant that she doesn't want you to drop her from English 1."

"I had not intended to," Sister Margaret casually replied.

Louise had a wildly impelling desire to transmit the golden news to Elizabeth then and there. But Elizabeth had raised her eyes heavenward, and now her voice rang out piercingly with the last words of mingled hope and sorrow:

> "'That I may appear with that blessed host
> That shall be saved at the day of doom,
> In manus tuas, of might the most,
> Forever commendo spiritum meum!'"

She sank into the grave. Good Deeds, summoned by the Recording Angel, glided off at the left exit; Knowledge delivered her last six lines, and made her exit at the right. The two monks, who had sat, statuesque and silent, all through the performance, on either side of the stage close to the footlights, now slowly mounted the platform and covered the grave with its heavy wooden lid. Amy Pasker, rehabilitated as a Medieval scholar, spoke the epilogue. The audience, having been requested for reasons of tone and harmony to refrain from applause, quietly crowded its way out into the hall, leaving the troupe exhausted, indeed, from its efforts, but, in regard to its prospects of election to the Dramatic Association, thoroughly satisfied.

Then ensued among the students the usual race to reach the dormitories before "lights out." Lou said

"Goodnight" to Sister Margaret, and ran off to the box office—a classroom on the second floor. Having been detained there for some moments, she was one of the last down at the door. Sister Margaret was waiting to see all safely out.

"Has everyone left the auditorium now?" she inquired.

"Yes—everyone," came the reply in chorus.

"Where's Bet Stedman?" someone called.

"Didn't she go over to Santa Rita?" Lou asked.

"No. We thought she was with you."

"Has anyone seen her since the play?" Lou stared anxiously around at them.

No one had.

"Then I know where she is."

She darted away and upstairs to the auditorium, followed by Sister Margaret and a little crowd of girls. Some one switched on the house lights as Lou stumbled up the steps of the platform to the grave. She lifted the lid, and peered carefully into the dark space below, where, as she had expected, white and motionless, lay Elizabeth.

"She's here!" cried Lou.

Through their united efforts they lifted poor Everyman, a limp pretty burden out of the grave. Mitzie Kumf fetched a glass of water, while Sister Margaret and Louise went through the usual methods of resuscitation, bathing Elizabeth's head and rubbing her hands until she opened her eyes and smilingly said,

"'Verily, Felaweshipe, gramercy.'

It was so awful hot in there, I guess I just fainted away."

When she was able to walk, the girls assisted her over to her room in Santa Rita Hall, and in a trice she was comfortably in bed.

lip to lip.) A fainting spell in addition to a dramatic triumph had made her doubly a heroine.

"She'll be elected, surely!" The word passed from

"I have some specially good news for you, 'Lisbeth," Lou said, after the others—their exuberant congratulations over—had departed.

"What's that?" asked Elizabeth sitting up with eager interest. "About English? I saw you talking to Sister Margaret."

"Yes. And she herself told me that you are *not* going to be dropped."

"Oh, thanks be to the dear Lord!" exclaimed Elizabeth. "Now, I can rest in peace. I've been in agony ever since I met that nun in the corridor. And if I've made the Dramatic Association, I'll be in bliss!"

"I'm happy, too," said Louise, her babyish mouth all smiles. "Sister told me something to-night. She told me she thought I could write. And I think I can, too. And during the play, I got the biggest idea. If I can only do it! I intend to begin right away."

"Good. Isn't that fine? What is it going to be?"

"It's going to be a novel about a college girl who wants to be an actress," Lou blushingly explained.

"What! And does she become one?" Elizabeth, her eyes aglow with excitement, leaned forward eagerly grasping Lou's arm.

"Yes, of course," laughed Lou growing more and more embarrassed over her disclosure of what at first she had intended to keep a precious secret. "But not till the last chapter. Now that's all I can tell you. Goodnight. I must go and begin while I have the inspiration."

"You're the *greatest* kid!"

The sincere though inelegantly phrased compliment rang with a pleasant re-echoing in the prospective young author's ears all the way to her own room. Arrived there, the difficulties attached to that indispensable act of "beginning," even under inspiration, were not long in impressing themselves upon her mind. She read fervently a page or two from a magazine. She read more calmly a whole chapter from *David Copperfield*. This

latter she held in regard as a preparative of special virtue. She moved from her comfortable arm-chair to the stiff little chair at her desk, and brought herself earnestly to the task of pondering that plot which at first had seemed to her fervid spirit complete, full-grown, ready for immediate transmission to an eager public, but which, now, in the chill of the waxing hours, revealed immaturities innumerable, and one appalling deficiency, egregious and absolutely unjustifiable in any novel boasting a heroine, namely, a hero. And so the agonies of authorship descended upon her there at her little desk, and there midnight found her still seated, two electric battery lamps beside her—set close together like goblin eyes to observe her anguished efforts—the end of her fountain pen pressed to her lips, and before her a blank sheet of paper on which in bold, brave characters, she had inscribed the words, HER GOAL—*Chapter I.*

Midnight also found Nell Rawdon slowly emerging from the darkness of Anne's room, an undaintily proportioned chicken sandwich in one hand, and an equally undaintily proportioned tomato sandwich in the other.

"Thanks awfully, Nanna. I couldn't sleep—I was so hungry."

From the room came a whispered interrogation.

"What? Didn't you hear?" Nell whispered back. "Neither one of them. Somers says she's sure the judges won't pass favorably on Lou, and Elizabeth's been debarred by order of the dean. She was reported for poor work in some of her classes. Would you think the nuns could be so exasperating?"

CHAPTER III

POSSIBLY A HERO

IF the creative soul would but wait patiently upon events instead of crashing ahead in a frenzy of self-consuming, because self-sufficient activity, the work of literary composition would be an easeful, joyous experience rather than the brain-dulling torture that, for the majority who attempt it, it invariably becomes. Thus thought Louise, at least, when after her days of struggle with the hero problem, it all at once began apparently to solve itself. From the outset she had intended her story to be a transcript of life at Convent Station, embracing such incidents as might chance to color, or mayhap leave colorless, the college careers mainly of the little group with which she found herself more or less associated. She herself would enter the narrative, though as an unobtrusive, insignificant figure in the remote background. The other characters would be Anne, and Nell, and Evelyn Parker (*Query?*), and possibly Mitzie Kumf, and Amy (Amy might do for a villian should the plot demand one), and chiefly and above all, Elizabeth. In the course of a shopping tour with Cousin Brenda, the Friday following Thanksgiving Day—or, to be more precise, at the very moment when Cousin Brenda had been vexatiously urging Louise to make a choice in her purchasing between a blue purse and a brown—Louise had desperately though finally decided that her story would necessarily be of that anomalous type called "a novel without a hero." In justice to her convictions regarding the rights of the reading public, it ought to be stated

that in the week prior to this crucial decision, she had experimentally introduced an imaginary hero into the action with the result that it had instantly assumed the tone of a ridiculous and impossible romance. The imaginary hero, poor fellow, quite hopelessly clogged the machinery, and naturally, therefore, had to be extracted and tossed into the scrap-heap, though the author felt sorry for him, and was, now and again, haunted in memory by the wraith of him.

She forgot him, however, as well as the entire problem when, the Sunday evening of her return to college after the Thanksgiving holiday, she sat chatting with Elizabeth on the dimly lighted stairway of the lower foyer in Santa Rita Hall. Elizabeth had some new shoes to admire, and Lou herself had a new wrist-watch to exhibit, a gift from her father. Lou had to tell Elizabeth about a luncheon set that Aunt Ellie had just completed, and Elizabeth had to repeat for Lou all the jests that had helped to season the Thanksgiving dinner in the Stedman household. This last topic sent to Lou's lips exclamations of happiness over her own "homey" Thanksgiving Day, for at the Maxon table there had been only her father, and Cousin Brenda, and Aunt Ellie, and herself. She deemed it unimportant to mention—though in her own thoughts the detail was far from negligible—that Mrs. Cartright was away in Canada visiting her sister. Hannah had cried over Lou when she was leaving for college Sunday afternoon. Hannah could make the most delicious turkey dressing in the whole world! If Bet could only taste it! Bet *must* taste it some day, Lou averred, and must meet Hannah some day, too! She was a dear! She was large and Peggotty-like, but her complexion was not very, very ruddy, and her hair was a sort of greenish white. "Different, you know," Lou added by way of lucid explanation. On such occasions as Thanksgiving and Christmas when there were no guests, but only the family, it was the custom for Hannah

to come in at dessert time, at which cheering and convivial moment they all drank her health in sherry or port or claret, and she responded with a cup of tea—for she had taken the pledge in her youth—and said, over and over, "God bless you! God bless you!"

"Golly, how nice!" exclaimed Elizabeth in holy envy.

"I didn't get to the theater at all. Did you?" Louise passed on to the next most logical subject for discussion.

"Yes—Thanksgiving night. I saw a great show, and met Anne's brother Frank and his wife, and, of course, Anne. Seems Frank knows Billy—"

"Billy?"

"Yes—Billy Tucker. He's a friend of—of the family," explained Elizabeth. "Pals round with the boys, and drops in at the house often."

Here Anne entered the foyer from outside, and stood before the long mirror at the door to remove her college cap and pat her dusk dark hair into correct and becoming lines.

"Been to the chapel, Anne?" inquired Elizabeth.

"Yes, I went over to make my stations." She came toward them.

Elizabeth, remembering, then, that she had not "made *her* stations," borrowed Anne's cap, and with a promise to join them later, went out into the cool November air.

"Did Bet tell you that she met my brother Frank and his wife?"

"Yes. She said Frank knew Billy Tucker. Who is Billy, Anne?"

"An awfully nice chap—a friend of Bet's—likes her a lot, Frank says. They're coming up next Sunday to see us."

That was all. From that point Anne proceeded to a discourse upon *her* holiday activities, a discourse which, though long and full and well phrased, aroused in her auditor only the feeblest attention as compared with that tingling, throbbing interest in a surely heaven-sent hero,

real, and ready, if she so wished, to step into the very opening chapter of her master-piece-to-be.

Exactly half an hour later, Billy made his debut into *Her Goal,* his appearance somewhat uncertain owing to an inconvenient absence of complexion and height.

"He was a ——— manly fellow with ——— hair and ——— eyes," Lou wrote, and then resolved upon another week of waiting which, she was now convinced, with its fruit of material and inspiration, would compensate her richly for all her weary and ineffectual hours of mental toil and brooding since that momentous night of *Everyman.*

Quite as Anne had predicted, the hero arrived with the Royces the following Sunday, but Elizabeth, pressing a hand to her face, alleged an inability to go down to meet the guests.

"I have a tooth-ache," she said, "and I'd only act stupid."

"But how will Billy feel?" protested Anne.

"He'll feel all right," Elizabeth assured her. "He wouldn't expect me to go down with a tooth-ache! Can't you explain to him?"

"Certainly, if you wish." Anne was calm and beautiful in a new dove gray gown which she was surveying with frank satisfaction in Elizabeth's mirror. "But you know yourself that he'll think it odd—though I suppose he's used to your fr—whims. Aren't you really coming?"

"No." Elizabeth had picked up a sofa cushion and was resting her cheek comfortingly against it.

"Well," said Anne, "I'll manage to entertain him!" And with a final glance into the mirror over a gracefully elevated shoulder, she glided from the room.

A heavy sense of something self-complacent in darling Anne's manner momentarily vexed Lou's spirit, and it was only through a supremely valiant struggle that she held the last redoubt against a battering temptation to confide her annoyance to her sister devotee. A few occa-

sions, it is true, had provoked them both to discussions of the Olympian one in terms far removed from superlative praise, but ordinarily and up to the present, they had by a kind of tacit agreement preserved a loyal and frequently an heroic silence upon the subject of what from time to time they perceived to be her actual shortcomings.

"She's a dear to be so obliging," Elizabeth now remarked.

"Does your tooth really ache?"

"She doubts my word." Elizabeth, addressing no visible person, and still holding the pillow to her cheek, closed her eyes and set her lips in lines which plainly betokened the martyr's attitude of resignation to all manner and description of suffering.

"No—but *does* it?" persisted Louise, leaning heavily upon the props of friendship for the averting of a disastrous retort.

"Well, not excruciatingly," Elizabeth admitted, slowly opening her eyes. "Just—just—"

"Conveniently."

"But it does ache some—really."

"Don't you like Billy?"

"A lot." This with a quizzical smile.

Silence. In the interests of her novel, Lou wanted immensely to inquire whether Billy held first place in the heart of the heroine, but the crude interrogation was justly and ruthlessly suppressed. Instead, she observed with immeasurable effort, though with seeming casuality,

"You act as if there were someone else."

"Yeah?" There was a swift upward glance at her from the brown eyes, and immediately afterwards a lowering of them, while their expression definitely though not ungently said, "This business is wholly mine."

Louise, to cover her own embarrassment, observed reproachfully,

"I thought I was going to meet Billy, and now I can't."

"Oh, did you want to?" Elizabeth sprang to her feet. "Wasn't I selfish? Come on. We'll go down."

A paroxysm of shyness, however, suddenly seized Lou at the imagined picture of herself a mute, *gauche* member of the company in the reception room, a foil to the exquisite and pervasive personality of Anne.

"Some other day, Bet. We have heaps of work to do for tomorrow, and we'd better begin to get at it."

"Are you sure you don't want to go down, Lou? Are you sure?"

"Sure. I was only joking. Where's your dictionary?" She found it on the bookcase-top. "Let's get at Latin and have it over."

Lured by the non-cultural objective thus honestly stated, Elizabeth succumbed, and so they "got at" Latin for a full hour and a half. At the expiration of this time, Elizabeth without warning dissipated their edifying intellectual concentration by declaring in the tone of one keenly hurt by society at large that she was "frightfully hungry."

"I couldn't eat anything at lunch," she said sadly.

"There's nothing in the tin box." Lou was wrinkling her brow over a text of paragraph blighted by at least a dozen verbs in "indirect discourse."

"Maybe there's something in Anne's room."

"Oh, Bet, *would* you?" The student wrinkles deepened into furrows clearly evidencing shocked surprise, for to Louise a foraging expedition in so sacred a spot as the sanctum of their almost ideal girl presented itself as an offense closely approximating sacrilege.

"Why not? Won't she probably get the candy Billy's bringing me?"

"But she's a senior, even if she is our friend."

"Oh, come on!"

Elizabeth pushed her books aside and went her headstrong way out into the corridor, followed by Lou, who

continued to mutter protests and arguments against the project until they had reached the very threshold of the shrine. Elizabeth, with what was deemed by her no excess of courtesy, knocked at the door, then threw it open wide, revealing a sight highly gratifying to her own eyes and only a little less so to those of her companion, whose fears and scruples began from that moment gradually but certainly to evaporate. For on Anne's table, invitingly arranged and standing out in the afternoon sunlight against the subdued background of the blue window drapery, were two golden oranges, a smooth yellow pear of graceful contour, three peaches of superb bloom and shape, and a great cluster of purple California grapes. They ate the oranges and two of the peaches.

"We'll leave her one," said Elizabeth considerately.

They decimated the cluster of grapes easily, almost unconsciously as they sat there talking, the appeasement of their hunger stimulating them to cheerful conversation upon topics varied and innumerable. At length, when both began to show signs of a waning interest in the fruit, Elizabeth stood, and permitting her eyes to rest upon the remnants of the party remarked with a superior air,

"I don't care much for pears. Do you?" She picked up from the table and held high before her by its perfect brown stem the beautiful specimen of pale yellow which had struck so appealing a note for them on their entrance into the room.

Louise did not reply, but rising slowly from her chair, stared horrified at some object near the door. Her fellow-forager turning quickly in that direction stared also in horror, for there formidably posed as if about to spring upon them was Anne, the regal Anne, the ordinarily tranquil mood of her classic countenance completely dethroned by a look of undisguised, unmitigated Amazonian wrath.

"I'd like to know what you mean!" Her voice was high and hard and angry.

"Why, Anne!" Elizabeth managed to gasp out the words. "We—we didn't think you'd mind! We're awfully sorry—"

"Sorry! Do you know what you've done?"

At the animosity of tone in the question Lou was throbbingly, almost heart-brokenly conscious that somewhere a beautiful house of cards was toppling to its fall. The situation quite paralyzed her powers of speech. Not so with her colleague, though *she* laughed nervously as she gathered her forces on a hesitating rejoinder.

"Done? Of course we know what we've done! We ate your fruit."

"You ate my *study!*"

"Study?"

"Yes! I had it all set up there! I worked on it all morning." She strode—yes, strode over to her desk and opened her paint box, on the inside cover of which a small half-completed canvas of the fruit was fastened, an embryonic colorful group against a shadowed background of blue. "And now I can't finish it! My lovely study!"

"Oh, Anne!" Elizabeth was genuinely distressed over her share in the undeliberate act of vandalism, while Lou grew more and more inarticulate under the crushing weight of guilt and wretchedness.

"Please go!" Anne waved them out of her indignant presence. "You're the freshest freshmen I ever met in my whole life!"

The vandals made precipitately for the door which, on their safe arrival outside, she slammed emphatically behind them.

Lou continued to suffer the throes of mortification. She edged shamefacedly along the wall, her ears tingling and her throat tightening the way it usually did when she was excited. But Elizabeth, having made a deep court curtsy to the closed portal, went laughing and

dancing down the hall in a maze of fancy whirling steps that brought her at length to Nell Rawdon's room. A knock elicited a question both sleepy and uncordial.

"Who's there?"

"Me! Never mind," called Elizabeth. "Did I wake you?"

A low muttering was the only response.

"Well, don't get up anyway."

The advice was tardy. The door slowly opened upon an unresplendent Nell, her straight blond hair in two ridiculous little braids, her heavy-lidded eyes blinking, her tall stout form encompassed and magnified by a faded pink bathrobe.

"What's all this noise about?" she drowsily inquired.

"Something's gone to smash—broken all to pieces." Elizabeth, her cheeks quite aflame, emphasized her reply with gestures nervously dramatic.

Lou, across the corridor, stood discomforted and still silence-stricken.

"What's broken all to pieces?" The question found its way through an ill suppressed yawn.

"A Grecian goddess!" laughed Elizabeth, but her laugh was not far from the hysterical. "She fell off her pedestal, and she's in smithereens."

"I don't know what you're talking about." There was a hint of complaining in the sleepy voice.

"Anne!" The name obviously was sufficient to explain all.

"A tiff?" A flicker of interest lighted Nell's round face for the fraction of a second.

"She was horrid!" Elizabeth's laughter suddenly ceased and she seemed quite on the verge of tears.

"Bet, don't!" Lou became vocal in protest. "You'll be sorry."

"I will not. She *was* horrid, Nell."

Nell leaned her bulk against the jamb of the door in indication of her readiness to await details.

"What did she do? Appropriate Billy Tucker?"

"Oh, much worse than that? She lost her temper over some old fruit of hers that we ate. I don't care!" Timely utterance gave promise of restoring Elizabeth to an average level of feeling.

"Anne? Never'd think it of her!" Nell was about to frown but checked the effort as unnecessarily laborious.

"It was a study," put in Lou, "a study for a picture. She was painting it."

"Oh!" Even the semi-somnolent Nell grasped the deep tragedy of the circumstances.

"But when we said we were sorry," the defendant continued, "she told us to get out."

"Anne?" Nell actually opened her eyes wide.

"She didn't say 'Get out,' Bet." Lou would do full justice to the absent.

"Well, perhaps, not exactly. But didn't she slam the door on us?"

Lou sorrowfully nodded an affirmation.

"And didn't she hurl abuse at us in slang? Slang!"

Lou regretfully continued to nod, murmuring, however, in extenuation of the accused one's lapse from good taste,

"We all use it."

"But not Anne! We never expected her to use it! Think of it, Nell! She called us 'fresh'! Wasn't that pretty rotten of her?"

"Can't you make it up?" Nell had a constitutional distaste for any sort of strife, fraught, as it was in her mind, with futile and troublesome exertion.

"Don't want to!"

"Don't you, Louie?"

"I don't know." Louise's mouth trembled a little, though she smiled. She had never in her life had what Nell called a "tiff"—except, of course, with Cousin Brenda whose disposition apparently demanded that kind of diversion. "I'm angry now, but I imagine when I'm

calmer, I'll understand that perhaps Anne couldn't help being furious. It's like—well, suppose you were writing a novel, and someone had eaten—I mean torn up a whole chapter of it—I don't know," went on Lou somewhat confusedly, "but I think when I'm calmer, I'll care for her just as much as ever."

"Of course, you'll care for her. I shall, too." Elizabeth spoke with the force of conviction. "But you won't be a goose about her, believing she's perfect and all that. As far as I'm concerned," she laughed again, but in normal tone, almost her true self once more, "I'm glad she tumbled off her pedestal. I like her better that way. I can quarrel with her comfortably now, and I feel free! Do you know how I feel?" She drew herself up on one toe, balancing herself with arms outstretched, her attractive brown head thrown back, "I feel like a Wingéd Victory!"

"*I* think you're both losing your senses," said Nell peevishly, and withdrew into her room.

But Lou was of the opinion that *she* understood, and, walking down the corridor, Elizabeth's arm round her and hers round Elizabeth, she also experienced a certain exhilaration as of spiritual liberty.

"If I ever *should* in a goat-like mood eat a chapter of your novel, you wouldn't really be angry with me. Would you?" asked Elizabeth affectionately.

"You couldn't eat a full chapter just yet," smiled Lou in reply, "because I haven't written one."

"Aw, hurry up, Louie! I'm dying to read it."

"I'll let you—some day."

Elizabeth's expression of unwillingness for a reconciliation had been a mere ferment of overwrought feeling. Two sincerely penned notes of apology dispatched to Anne early Monday morning and including a joint invitation to tea in Morristown Wednesday afternoon, bore results satisfactory to all involved in the little unpleasantness which had marred that Sunday of Billy's first visit

to Convent. Elizabeth and Lou unhesitatingly confessed that they had been stupid, and Anne, when the three sat round the table in the Morristown tea-shop, admitted, with a sensitive twitching of her fine lips, that she had disgracefully lost poise under pressure of circumstances.

"It's just as well that it happened," she observed. "An experience of that sort shows us what we really are."

Against the attraction of this humble moment both Lou and Elizabeth were fain to fight hard, and did so fight, for they had decided, after several solemn conferences upon the subject, never again to place Anne, however dear she might become, on that high pedestal for worship which, from their very first meeting, she had occupied.

At Billy's second visit, with the Royces, the following Sunday, Elizabeth could not be found. Twice Anne called for her at Lou's room, and Olga, the maid, at the end of a long fruitless tour of the dormitory, dropped in to complain in thin wailing monotone to the missing student's friend.

"I rung her bell three times already. We telephone—me and Sister—all over the college. It's that same young man what was here last Sunday, and he'll be terrible in his feelings if he won't see her again today."

"Never mind, Olga. Miss Royce went down."

"Yes. She's went down." Olga shook her head disapprovingly, tightening her queer little mouth. "But I don't think it's so fair to Miss Stedmant."

Olga had thumped her way downstairs again, and several minutes had elapsed, when Elizabeth came tripping along the hall in kimono, her head wrapped up in a towel. She knocked at Lou's door and admitted herself.

"Hello! Did Billy arrive?"

"*Did* he? Didn't you hear your bell ringing?"

"Was *that* my bell?"

"And Anne and Olga and everyone's been searching the place for you!"

"Dear me! I just knew my hair wouldn't be dry on time!" She proceeded vigorously to rub her locks with a towel.

"You're a nice Catholic, too, washing your hair on Sunday!" The purpose of this smilingly uttered remark was very definitely mischievous, for Lou had had more than one proof of Elizabeth's falling prey to unreasonable qualms of conscience on occasions when she deemed herself a disedifying example to her non-Catholic friend.

"My intention was high." The rebuke had missed aim.

"What was it?"

"Guess."

Outside there sounded suddenly and loudly the rumble of a car. Louise glanced through the window.

"They're going!"

Through the scrim curtains, the two viewed the party. Mr. and Mrs. Frank Royce were seated in the back of the machine. Anne and the hero—the latter now discovered by an alert author to be truly tall, and blond of a sort—stepped into the front, and though the three Royces were to all seeming, exceptionally merry, Billy beyond doubt was preoccupied.

"Poor old Bill!" sighed Elizabeth. "I wish he would like Anne."

"Evidently he does like her," Lou murmured, and knew not that her honest deep blue eyes wore a half wistful expression as they followed the moving car down the curve of the road. "Taking her out for a ride!"

"That's nothing. Doesn't prove anything. What I mean—" Elizabeth spoke with tense earnestness—"what I mean is—I wish he would kind of change off, so to speak—and, *you* know—kind of imperceptibly, as it were, devote his affections to Anne."

Not so was Billy inclined, however—at least, temporarily. The very Tuesday after his second visit, there entered Lou's room—where she sat conscientiously endeavoring to make intelligible to herself a conglomerate

of erudite terms contained in her botany notebook—an anxious-eyed Elizabeth.

"Look at this," she said pallidly, handing Lou a letter and sinking into a chair.

The letter was composed of one sincere compound-complex sentence which read:

DEAR LIZA,

I want to ask you a very important question next Sunday afternoon at twenty minutes to three in the reception room of Santa Rita Hall, and if you don't come down this time, I'll be justified in feeling that you haven't the ghost of an interest in the spiritual and temporal welfare of

Your old friend,
Bill.

A pardonable excitement stirred the author of *Her Goal*. The heroine was manifestly torn with anguish.

"I'll have to answer it, I suppose," she remarked woefully. "What would you say if you had to?"

Not for an instant did it occur to the author to do otherwise than abjure the literary point of view in the interests of human happiness, though, according to all formulae for novel-writing, Billy's important question ought to be deferred to the heroine's senior year.

"I—I suppose I'd let him come!"

"What do you suppose he wants to ask me?" The heroine stared fixedly at the author, scrutinizing her countenance for signs of enlightenment.

The author, in her turn, fell to scrutinizing her wrist-watch, and feebly responded,

"Maybe something about Anne."

To this evasion, bordering demonstrably upon the untruthful, Elizabeth made no reply, but with a baffled and slightly hurt look in her eyes, rose and walked limply to the door.

"Where are you going?"

"I have chem lab now. But just answer this—would you write to him tonight?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"That's just it! Why not? It's easy to say!" She stood there in dubious mood, her hand on the knob. "But *would* you? *Would* you?"

"I would, I tell you—surely." Louise now began unreasonably to laugh at the dejected figure before her.

"Am I funny?"

"Awfully!"

"Then I'll write tonight," Elizabeth declared with astounding logic. "Yes, I'd better write tonight, I suppose." She went out, staring back unseeingly at Lou, who for her part, had a cringing sense of mortification at her failure adequately to rise to this extraordinary occasion.

Left alone, she went over to her little bird's-eye maple desk and drew forth from its hiding place under papers and note-books in the drawer, her treasured manuscript. Once more she read it from its now too familiar beginning, her pulse going weak at the jerkiness of her sentences and the baldness of her vocabulary, and her imagination balking absolutely at the problem of introducing into Chapter I an incident which could appropriately occur—at least, in a college story—no earlier than the middle of the book.

"Poor Anne!" she murmured. "I don't blame her for being furious about the fruit! Art *is* terrible!"

The discouraged author stretched her arms over her manuscript, and having lowered her head upon her arms began, with eyes closed, to "dream" her story for the hundredth time from the very first scene of its action. She dreamed thus wakefully for half an hour or more. But the hour between two-thirty and three-thirty P.M. was never designed for wakeful dreams, and so at three-thirty she was sound asleep.

At four she sat up with a start.

"Botany! I've cut it!"

Now the college authorities were wont—annoyingly in many instances—to maintain an ill-directed, in fact an altogether illiberal interest in students who chanced unaccountably to absent themselves from lectures or recitataions. Admission to class after an unauthorized "cut" was securable only through a pass signed by the dean and presented to the instructor. The dean, it is true, was the reverse of a formidable person; nevertheless, Louise, naturally shy with the sisters in general, shrank from going to the office alone. On such a faring, a Roland would find at least comfort in an Oliver, and so she decided to ask Elizabeth to accompany her to the dark tower on the morrow, an additional reason for procrastination being the apparently counterfeit character of the excuse she must needs present.

"Fell asleep?" smiled Nell benevolently that night after supper. "Louie, you *are* the dearest little dish of spinach! *Who* do you expect to believe that? I don't like to give you bad advice—No! I *won't* advise you to fabricate something that will be believed—No, not to prevent—"

"Don't listen to her, Pollywog," interrupted Elizabeth. "Your terribly truthful eyes would make anyone believe anything." And she went on quite irrelevantly, when Nell with an amused shrug of her shoulders had walked off to join a group of her classmates, "I telephoned Billy before supper, and told him I was going home this week-end. I told him I'd see him Sunday night. I suppose Father will be there to talk politics," she added in musing forethought, though in a tone surprisingly lacking the note of opposition to the anticipated circumstance. "How about your coming with me, Louie?"

"I'd love to. But I'd better spend some time with the Maxon family—don't you think?"

"Well, come over to our house Sunday."

"I'll see what I can do. I'll go call up Cousin Brenda now to let her know that I'll be home Friday."

Cousin Brenda evinced an almost excessive appreciation of her young relative's thoughtfulness in visiting the homestead so soon after Thanksgiving.

"You know you don't come as often as you might," she said shrilly over the wire.

"Well, I'll see you surely Friday night."

"Friday night?"

"Yes—Friday night."

Thursday came. Elizabeth knelt in the chapel after Mass—when the majority of her devout compeers, voluntary worshipers at the morning Sacrifice, had departed—and prolonged for several moments her usual prayers of thanksgiving. In the fervor of her soul, moreover, she repeated the "morning offering" which on rising she had said, under pressure of limited time, with a haste somewhat undue and distracted. Having then concluded her spiritual holocaust of all her "prayers, works and sufferings" of the day—and among these last she unflinchingly foresaw a trigonometry test at ten-thirty—she rose in quiet recollection, went out, and stood for a moment on the chapel steps in rapt and exalted mood.

"It's glorious!" she whispered.

She ran down the steps, crossed the stretch of grass near the building, and danced along the shady path under the pines leading out to the walk beyond the rectory terrace. The terrace was still green—a bewitching circumstance to Elizabeth's heart this morning of December. "It is glorious!" She continued along the walk, smiling blissfully to herself, because she was enjoying it all *by* herself, aloof alike from the observation of her fellows as from their gratuitously irritating comments upon the beauties of nature. A faint gentle snow had been falling—apparently during Mass hour—and had sprinkled the roads with a thin powdery coating, marking them out with new attractiveness in their sweep down along the green spaces or in their great curve up past the

red-brown slant of the woodland. The woods themselves were rich with the clear olive of pines and cedars, with the subdued maroons and browns of oak leaves, and with the dark trunks of lacey-topped elms stretching out branches delicately limned in white.

"It's a whiz of a day!"

Impelled to share her gladsomeness, she addressed Louise on the subject, and Mitzie Kumf, and Mitzie's room-mate, Alicia Remon, before breakfast, at the dining-hall door.

"Isn't it a whiz of a day?"

Echo, in the person of her *alter ego,* answered enthusiastically, "A whiz!"

Mitzie half apologetically murmured, "Wonderful!"

And Alicia, rolling her brown Spanish eyes in unrestrained evidence of her appreciation, exclaimed, "Beautiful! A beautiful, beautiful day!"

They met again just before the trigonometry test. Elizabeth's spirits were slightly lower; Louise was positively depressed; Mitzie was suffering acutely from an uncontrollable accession of nervous fears; Alicia was entirely given up to despair.

"Never mind. It will soon be over." Elizabeth led the way into the room, and seated herself near the window, a position which offered pleasant possibilities of alleviating the anguish incidental to the struggle with logarithms by intermittent communings with the landscape.

Toward the end of the first half hour she sat gazing in rapture at the still persisting beauty of out-doors, presenting to the weak, at the same time, a disedifying example of happy relaxation. All at once, afire with a great thought, she scribbled a line on a scrap of paper and passed it to Lou. With puzzled brow the latter read the mystic scroll.

"Are there aureoles in December?"

"Aureoles" might conceivably be associated with the

study of religion or even of literature. Why did Elizabeth desire this information? Could it be that Louise herself in her mathematical studies—and she was ready to concede the point—had missed some connection between halos and such unsanctified entities as tangents and co-tangents, sines and co-sines, radii, parabolas, and the rest? Out of her thoroughly perplexed concentration upon the problem, Louise was startled suddenly by the sound of an awe-inspiring voice, the instructor's, deliberate and firm.

"I'll take your papers, Miss Stedman and Miss Maxon."

Dark disgrace overshadowing them, they walked up to the desk with the results of their honest toil, Elizabeth blushing a vivid crimson, Louise turning quite pale. The instructor casually tore the test papers into several pieces and dropped them into the waste basket.

"It was my fault," murmured Elizabeth. "It was my fault. But it wasn't about the test—really. Give Sister the note, Lou."

"It doesn't make any difference what it was about." Sister Madeline spoke in an undertone necessarily, to prevent disturbance of the other students, the honorable majority. "You broke a rule."

Nevertheless, she glanced at the note as the two offenders passed out into the corridor, and received them graciously when, at the end of the period, they returned to "talk it over."

"Couldn't we possibly get credit?" Elizabeth pleaded.

"Not possibly," smiled Sister Madeline. "You knew the rule. But why are you interested in aureoles? Are you planning to become a saint?"

"Is that a sign?" Elizabeth drew a troubled hand across her forehead. "They come in the spring, and I thought I heard one singing. It's such a whiz of a day," she added by way of apology.

Sister Madeline's perceptive faculties were as keen as

the sight in her gray eyes. She understood. She even sympathized. She went further, generously proffering all the information at her disposal on the subject of orioles, and promising, in due season, to show the delinquents an oriole's nest.

"She was really awfully nice about it," whispered Lou at the conclusion of the conference, as they betook themselves with lagging steps down to the library on the first floor.

"She ought to give you another test." Elizabeth's mouth drooped disconsolately. "She's unfair! It was my fault!"

But Louise slipped her arm through Elizabeth's.

"It really doesn't matter, Bet. I should have failed anyway. I'm hopeless in math."

"You're precious, Lou."

They entered the library, happily smiling at life, which held so securely for them—whatever trial or scourge might befall them—their treasured friendship for each other. Lou dutifully headed toward a row of encyclopedias to quarry material for a history paper, while Elizabeth ambled over to the dictionary on its attractive window-shelf, mildly bent upon verifying the spelling of the name of the bird that had wrought them woe. She turned to the O's and then to the Or's. And then glancing out through the mullioned pane, she rediscovered that it was "a whiz of a day."

"A person ought to have some fun on a day like this." She nodded cheerily at Deborah Morgan, who, having sprung from her car at the entrance to the building—Deborah was a day pupil—was running up the steps, care-free and gay.

Elizabeth liked Deborah, as anyone should. She was a generous, whole-souled girl, if annoyingly over-conscientious about leaving the campus promptly at four-thirty every afternoon. Her mother would be anxious, Deborah frequently, almost habitually explained, if she were

not home each evening at five—she lived a few townships away—and besides, the family would be cantankerous if she kept the car out later. The car usually offered to more than its quota of freshmen, each day at twelve-thirty, a means of rapid transit between Santa Maria Hall and the main building. Elizabeth remembered the fact now, and resolved that on this particular "whiz" she would grace one of the runners just for a little extra thrill.

At noon hour she kept her resolution, while eleven others of Deborah's classmates held precarious and uncomfortable positions in the tonneau. After luncheon, on the ride up to the recitation hall, Elizabeth aristocratically occupied the front seat with Deborah.

"All out!" The chauffeur herself jumped nimbly to the ground. Her passengers with one exception followed her example, and hastened indoors at the sound of the summoning bell.

The one passenger, Elizabeth, still apparently under the influence of nature's beauties, remained at her place, temptingly near the wheel. She was not due at class until two-thirty—a chemistry laboratory. She had intended virtuously to work for an hour in the library, but the air was delightful—exhilarating. Her eyes rested half casually on the speedometer for a moment, then blinked a bit with awakened interest. She bent over and scrutinized eagerly the motorial equipment of the Morgan car.

"I could if I tried!" The words were muttered argumentatively to some invisible challenger.

Round the corner of Santa Maria Hall, in serene meditation came Louise.

"Class, Poll?"

"Not till three-thirty."

"Like to go for a spin?" Elizabeth's hands were on the wheel.

"Think Deb will mind?" Louise climbed in.

"Sure not. Never drove this make before, but it isn't so different."

They drove out from the now quiet precincts of Santa Maria, slowly and carefully, but increased their speed as they began to cover the long downward slope of the road. Near the green-house they stopped, saluted by Alicia and Mitzie.

"What time class?" Elizabeth called out.

Mitzie held up two fingers and shrilly yelled, "Thirty."

"Same here. Come on for a spin."

Mitzie and Alicia, far from declining the invitation, scrambled in and settled their short selves bouncingly in the rear seat. Blithely then the party sped on till they reached the main exit from the campus. There they were hailed rather peremptorily by Nell Rawdon.

"Where are you going?"

"Morristown. Hot chocolate." Elizabeth, eyes straight ahead, shouted the words into the air. "Good-by."

"You'll be killed. Whose machine? You haven't registered—"

The prophecy of untimely death was figurative in its significance, having reference merely to collegiate discipline. But Nell's words were wasted, blown along the wind, as the car went skimming through the gate, across the rail-road tracks, and down the avenue leading to the broad highway.

"That's true, Bet!" Louise suddenly foresaw disaster. "We haven't registered or gotten permission or anything!"

"Or a chaperon!" put in Alicia clasping her hands in apparent dismay, though, if the truth were known, she was thrilled immeasurably by what to her unsophisticated fancy seemed a daring and very American "escapade."

"We'll be late for lab," suggested Mitzie.

"Nonsense!" Elizabeth returned to all fearsome no-

tions. "Nonsense! We'll just get a hot chocolate and hurry back. My, but it's a whiz of a day!"

Louise, temporarily buoyed up by the chauffeur's assured manner, and quickened to confidence, moreover, by the stimulating air and sunshine, yielded herself to the enjoyment of the hour. It was not imperative that she be back until half past three. Mitzie, moodily inacquiescent and insensible to the tranquillizing influence of nature, grumbled and muttered for an eighth of a mile, at the completion of which stage in their race against time her murmurings were checked by Alicia's persuasive words. Alicia argued with logic irrefutable that, since they had already rendered themselves amenable to penalization by leaving the campus under prohibited conditions it was to their advantage, in anticipatory compensation for the dark fate awaiting them on their return, to get and to enjoy the hot chocolate so pleasantly preparing for them in Morristown, and *en route* to discard all anxious apprehensions.

"You keep yourself thin and worn-looking with all this worry, Mitzie," she concluded. "Have more confidence! *Ay,* but this breeze is what I should call superb! *Ay, chica!*"

At four o'clock in the second corridor of Santa Maria Hall, Nell encountered Deborah Morgan, her round fresh face transformed into a veritable gargoyle of battling emotions.

"Do you suppose the dean's in her office?" she ran a vehement hand through her black bobbed hair.

Nell, though of a nature ordinarily callous to intuitions, was conscious of a certain electrification in that part of her brain which, on rare occasions, deliberately exercised itself in associating ideas.

"What's the matter?"

"My car's gone. I've been looking for it for an hour. It must be stolen. I'm going to speak to the dean about it."

"She's—awfully busy. I—really—I shouldn't disturb her at this hour." Nell drew the perturbed one away from the official neighborhood. "I believe I saw your car. I'll tell you what I know about it."

Deborah received the news calmly enough—in fact, with a gulp of relief—for she had pictured thieves of another type, and had realized guiltily her remissness in neglecting to lock the family automobile.

"But they ought to be back by now. Louie had botany at three-thirty, and Bet had chem lab from two-thirty on. Do you suppose anything—anything happened?"

Nell's pulse quickened for several beats, but she immediately willed it back to its normal rate.

"They're all right. There's nothing to worry about," she said.

"I can't possibly be home by five if they don't come soon." Staring with pained eyes at Nell, Deborah saw her not, for intervening to blur the calm reality was an imaged countenance, Mrs. Morgan's, with a stern frown upon its brow.

"We'll go over to the gate and wait. They *must* come back soon."

"Soon" proved to be exactly a quarter past five. Slowly the car drew in through the entrance; slowly and somewhat sheepishly the four alighted and approached Deborah to offer their apologies.

"We're so sorry!"

She leaped into her recovered property, and began backing out. "Don't talk to me now." There was a choking sound in her voice. "I won't get home till nearly six. Mother will be furious."

Mutely they watched her reverse in the open space near the station and drive off down the avenue.

"Rank luck!" Elizabeth spoke in the low half-whisper of the chastened and subdued.

"Well, you've made a nice mess of it? What hap-

pened?" Nell, at first inclined to embrace the prodigals, now assumed an elder-sisterly air of censoriousness.

"The darn thing stalled." Elizabeth broke off a piece of evergreen and dolefully nibbled at it. "Something wrong with the machinery. I couldn't start it."

"What did you do?"

"The drug-store man got some dumbheads from a garage. They couldn't do a thing for ages! Such luck!"

"Did you get your hot chocolate?" Nell's question was accompanied by a gratuitous and mocking smile.

Elizabeth obstinately pressed her lips together, but Mitzie volunteered in pathetic tones,

"It was luke-warm."

"Poor Deborah!" sighed Louise. "I know just how she feels. I'd hate to be going home to Cousin Brenda under the circumstances."

A sharp glance of rebuke from her bosom friend cut short further expression of sympathy.

Nell perceived little indication of genuine remorse in the group. "I'd hate to be all of you when the dean finds out," she said.

"She won't!" Elizabeth flung her twig of evergreen away. "Don't tell *anyone*. Do you hear?" she adjured her fellow buccaneers.

Mitzie's eyes filled. "Do you mean me?"

"Don't be silly!" Elizabeth's own nerves were manifestly at the fraying point.

Mitzie darted ahead of the others, suspiciously dabbing at her eyes. Alicia ran to catch up with her, placed a defensive arm round her, and looking back observed with aristocratic hauteur,

"Elizabeth, how could you be so unpolite?"

"I'm chilly," remarked Louise in a tactful endeavor to divert thoughts and speech into channels smooth and safe. "It was cold coming back. I suppose we'll all have pneumonia."

"Try to say something really cheerful, Louie—won't you? It helps." The request was made in dry, uncordial tone by the ring-leader.

Louise raised eyes to Nell supplicating aid in the crisis. Nell, with a sidelong glance and a shake of the head, signaled the advisability of silence. Silently, therefore, under a sky grown sunless and gray, the buccaneers made their way to Santa Rita Hall; and silently there, each in her own boudoir, prepared for the evening meal.

At six, the leader came running toward the other three, who stood in dismal conference near the door of the dining-hall.

"Now, Mitzie—Honestly I'm awfully sorry—and Louie. I was fiendish, I know—"

But Alicia smiled radiantly with expansive display of her straight white teeth.

"Never mind, Bet, so long as we—how do you say in English?—got—got away with it."

"Yes, we did." Mitzie shook her head sagaciously. "No one seems to know. We certainly got away with it."

"Do you really think so?" Louise's arm was through Elizabeth's once more. The latter was smiling an embarrassed smile and blushing hotly.

"We had such luck," she murmured, her eyes downcast. "And it was such—such a gorgeous day!"

Bitter and deep ought to have been Sister Margaret's hostility to the Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western Railroad because of its ordinance that at two-thirty-four, on Friday afternoons, a train bound New York-wards should stop at Convent Station. For in consequence of this ruling, at about two-twenty, in her otherwise model class—English 1, Section A—indications of restlessness began to appear. A nose was surreptitiously powdered; a hat, hitherto reposing on the floor, was venturesomely if unobtrusively placed at the correct angle on a "water-

waved" or close-cropped head; locks of hair were tucked in, and backsliding hair-pins, reputed to be "invisible," were restored to their duty; only the stony gaze of the instructor prevented a general consultation of wrist-watches. The end of the crucial five minutes was announced by an electric bell outside—the signal for dismissal. One minute for the brief prayer after class, and English 1, Section A, *en masse,* with bated breath, its imagination beholding the two-thirty-four already impatiently puffing for it at the station, crowded from the room, downstairs, and out of the building for the dash over to the train.

"We can't make it," resignedly gasped Elizabeth, falling back behind the racing column of week-enders. "We haven't registered. We'll have to wait for the three-thirteen."

Louise graciously submitted to this hardship. "The three-thirteen isn't so bad as the four twenty-eight." Her eyes were bright with anticipation of the hours she was to spend at the Stedman domicile where she would meet Billy, and Elizabeth's mother—who must be precious from Elizabeth's account of her—and Elizabeth's father, and her young sister, and all her brothers including, of course, Jack. Cousin Brenda had objected by telephone Thursday night, but Mr. Maxon had called up Friday morning to veto the objection.

"Go—by all means. And—ahem!—my compliments to Jack."

Sister Angela was seated at her desk when the two girls entered her office in Santa Rita Hall to register their departure.

"We've missed the two thirty-four. We're going on the three thirteen," Elizabeth in comradely manner informed her.

Sister removed her glasses, polished them with a piece of chamois, and replaced them in their insecure position on her nose. Then gazing steadily at the two attractive

impersonations of youth in their faultless traveling attire, she remarked,

"Oh, no! Haven't you seen the dean? Word has come down from her office that you're both campused. Let me see." She consulted a small black-covered memorandum book. "Maxon—Louise—two botany absences without explanation—and one from chemistry, E. Stedman. Was it Thursday? Yesterday? Yes. A garage company called up to identify you. They were concerned about a bill for repairs. Whose car?" she asked interestedly.

"Debbie Morgan's," miserably answered Elizabeth. "But it was my fault. Couldn't Louise go home? Or couldn't we be campused next week?"

"The order has come from the dean." Sister Angela spoke with a casual finality of tone. "You're only freshmen, you know. You must keep the rules."

Elizabeth shrewdly suppressed an impulse to combat her superior's logic. Coaxing would be more effective. But five minutes of experimenting elicited from her merely a mild expression of surprise at their expectation of indulgence. At length they withdrew from her obdurate presence into the foyer, where they stood for several minutes in a forlorn state of shock, quite incapable of action.

"And Alicia said we got away with it!" exclaimed Elizabeth bitterly. "That's the Latin race all over! They make me tired! They're so darn hopeful!"

They went down to the booth in the lower foyer to telephone the depressing news to their relatives.

"Absurd!" cried Cousin Brenda in high temper. "I'll have your father take you away! The idea! I never heard of such a thing! If your father were home, I'd have him go right up and take you away!"

"Where is he?"

"Where do you suppose but in Albany?"

"Oh." The spectre of another woe more serious than

that immediately engaging her attention hovered before Lou's imagination. "Mrs. Cartright?"

"Mrs. Cartright." Cousin Brenda's tone was vehemently confirmative. Moreover, against that disorganizing personality she launched out into a tirade the length of which—despite central's considerate interruptions—appreciably augmented for the month of December the Maxon telephone bill. "Well, goodby," she ended. "Perhaps it's just as well that you're up there away from it all."

The look of dazed sadness on Lou's round countenance as she came out of the booth compelled the instant sympathy of Elizabeth, who, divining the cause on hearing a name which Jack had once mentioned with no uncertain disesteem, caught Lou by the hand with, "Wait!" and held her there during her own communication with her sister Margery. Margery was evidently gifted with understanding. She could be depended upon.

"That's right. Explain the whole thing to Mother. I'm sorry. And tell Billy I won't be home Sunday night. What? Jack? Giving up his position? Mrs.—Mrs.—Her nephew?" Lou felt a twitching of Elizabeth's hand against hers. "*Write* me about it, Margy. I—I have to say goodby now. Goodby."

They spent the rest of the afternoon in a disconsolate roaming about the campus from which all glory had temporarily departed. The evening, in an unusually quiet Santa Rita Hall, they found almost beyond human endurance. Saturday was flat and monotonously irritating. Sunday, however, bringing crisp and bright weather, stimulated them to mental work. The early afternoon hours saw them in the library, therefore, diligently engaged upon "prescribed reading," and really beginning to enjoy, with a few other students, their monopoly of the long sunny reading room.

"When the crowd isn't here—" Elizabeth leaned her elbow contentedly upon the table, supporting her head

against her hand—"I feel as if I owned the place. Don't you like it this way, Louie?"

Louise, with a glance toward the librarian, discreetly nodded, "Yes."

After an interval of seven or eight minutes Elizabeth pushed her book away, placed both arms comfortably on the table, and lazily resting her head on her arms, with her one visible eye looked up at Louise.

"I'm so sleepy that something's got to happen to wake me up."

"Something will happen if you don't keep still."

The librarian, who had gone outside at the sound of the telephone bell, was returning to the room. As she approached them, Elizabeth raised her head and assumed a position befitting the scholastic environment.

"A gentleman in Santa Rita Hall to see Miss Stedman," said the librarian.

Elizabeth, murmuring a "Thank you," rose dully from her chair. The librarian went back to her desk.

"Could it be Billy, Lou?"

"Maybe Jack."

"To see me?" His sister flouted the idea. "Will you come down with me?"

"I must finish this assignment."

"Will you come down later?"

"How soon?"

"Fifteen or twenty minutes."

"Perhaps."

"If you don't, I'll never forgive you." Elizabeth dragged reluctant steps across the floor and out of the library.

Through a window Lou watched her walking slowly down the hill, hands in sweater pockets, her brown head drooping, her eyes bent upon the ground.

"If it were Billy!"

Louise sitting erect, fixed blank eyes upon the brass electric lamp on the table before her. To a spectator

of small intelligence she might have appeared slightly *non compos.* The keener intellects, however, would have recognized at first sight, in that apparently empty gaze, the index of a mind coping with the high tide of imagination, gloriously and courageously alone. *Her Goal,* in fact, was undergoing its dozenth revision. For thrice unwelcome as he was to the heroine, the hero had undoubtedly arrived on business which in his conception of it, belike, was all too important to defer until her senior year.

Emerging from this dream at the end of twenty minutes, with a guilty start and an expression of violent contempt for herself, Louise sprang up hastily, left her book at the desk, hurried out of the building, and ran the full way down to the dormitory. She entered it through the lower door. For a moment she stood before the long mirror at the left critically viewing her reflection. Not precisely gratified with the extreme youthfulness of her imaged self, she nevertheless went on, intending to make the stairway leading to the upper foyer, on a swift run. At the second step below the landing, however, she stopped, gasping. She could not believe that she had really heard the words! And yet they had come down to her very distinctly, almost as if she had been meant to hear—Elizabeth and her guest must have been standing at the head of the stairs near the newel post, Elizabeth, possibly, bending a little over the balustrade. Her voice was very gentle, with a little note of kindly laughter in it. "The reason I don't want you to keep coming, Billy, is because you might fall in love with me."

Louise backed precipitately to the *terra firma* of the lower foyer, then darted away and up another staircase to her room, where at her window she sat tensely watching until, after about eight minutes more, she saw the hero of *Her Goal* depart. For some subtle reason which she had not analyzed, Billy had come to be associated in her mind with Jack. It was not that they closely re-

sembled each other, though both were tall and well-built and fair-haired. But whatever its cause, the mental association was there. Particularly today she noticed Billy's blond hair, because though a bleak wind had begun to blow from the north, he was carrying his hat in his hand. His coat, flung awkwardly over his arm, trailed a sleeve on the ground, and he strode along very rapidly and, beyond doubt, unseeingly, too, since three rather pretty freshmen were obliged to step off the walk to permit him to pass. One of them bestowed a frosty stare upon him. But even that he did not see.

"Poor Billy!" murmured Louise, quite distorting the attractively youthful contour of her face by pressing upward against each cheek-bone with forceful finger tips. "Poor Billy!" Slowly, inevitably, *Her Goal* floated away into the temporary oblivion of secondary things, the aching joys and dizzy raptures of literary composition seeming an experience trivial and selfish to one hearing piteously the still sad music of humanity. "Poor, poor Billy! I hope he doesn't get pneumonia, too!"

CHAPTER IV

INSPIRATIONAL

THE pleasantest part of her first Christmas vacation from college was, in Lou's recapitulation of it, the evening of the closing day when, back with friends and foes in Santa Rita Hall and one of an indomitable flotilla of dancers, she moved round and round the reception room—Elizabeth her partner—to Amy Pasker's military and pianola-like rendition of the latest popular airs.

"Isn't it great to be back?" Lou jerked out the question on a somewhat inhibited chuckle as, by an adroit larboard tack, she and Elizabeth barely managed to escape collision with two cumbersome, schooner-like classmates blindly cruising ahead in thoughtless disregard for the safety of smaller and frailer craft. "Isn't it great?"

"Great? Nothing! I thought I'd just die leaving them all to-day! I thought I'd just die! It was worse than in September. I just had to tear myself away from Mother!"

Lou, unready with a rejoinder, had recourse to the subterfuge of adding her voice to the many now sublimating with a sweet melody of words the tune so mercilessly beaten into the atmosphere by the athletic pianist. Even to Elizabeth Louise was reluctant to disclose the real source of her present high spirits, that source being, as she was too truly aware, an extraordinarily distinct sense of relief at getting away from certain dark concomitants of her Christmas holidays—from those embar-

rassingly silent tête-a-têtes with her father, those equally embarrassing however infrequent meetings with Mrs. Cartright, and from Cousin Brenda's endless philippics against the "scheming creature," who threatened disruption of the Maxon household. Cousin Brenda, indeed, had not reserved all of her upbraidings for the securely unlistening Laura, but had, more than once, directly imputed to Louise a culpability for her passiveness in the trying circumstances. The situation would adjust itself satisfactorily, Cousin Brenda had one day asserted with her accustomed virulence, if Louise would only "take a stand."

"Take a stand?"

"Yes. Are you blind?"

No. She was not blind; neither was she quite certain which she resented more—her father's devotion to Mrs. Cartright or the criticism to which he was subject because of it on the part of their Amazonian relative. Sometimes, moreover, in the midst of a very whirl of indignant feeling against her father, Louise was conscious of a deep and poignant sympathy with him, for to her he gave the unhappy effect, more often than otherwise, of being led on against his own wiser judgment. And so, with the emotions of the family pitched to unpleasant and strained heights, Lou's holiday had not been really worthy of the name. She was glad now utterly to forget it.

At a moment when Amy desisted from her muscular performance, and when, since the dancing had stopped, Elizabeth's attention was engaged by Evelyn Parker, Lou went out to greet Anne where she sat in abstracted mood on the foyer stairway.

"Have a nice vacation, Anne?"

"Marvelous!" Anne's gaze rested upon the glittering line of athletic trophies which have, for many years, signally marred the restrained appeal of the foyer mantelpiece. But Anne saw not cups of silver plate or plaques of copper or of bronze. "Louise," she unexpectedly

asked with a self-conscious, side-long glance from her somber eyes," do you know anyone in the newspaper business?"

The reply came regretfully in the negative.

"Don't you think it's an excellent calling for a man?" The question was put with an obvious though futile effort at an impersonal tone.

"I suppose so." Upon such an inquiry from a senior, a freshman might pardonably be mystified. Louise was. "I never thought much about it."

"I wonder how much they—" She was on the verge of uttering the middle class word, "earn," but checked the *faux pas* with a delicate cough—"I wonder what their income is!'

"Whose?"

"Reporters'." Anne's classical lips relaxed in a tell-tale smile.

Here Elizabeth summoned Lou for the next dance. But Lou's imagination was already in action, nor was she inclined to retard or to frustrate its operations upon material which might serve glamourously to complicate the plot of *Her Goal.*

"Let's talk instead," she said, and Elizabeth followed her through the crowd without demur over to one of the window seats in the reception room. "Didn't you tell me Billy Tucker was a lawyer?"

"Sure. Just beginning. 'Lo, Nell!" Elizabeth waved a greeting to their junior friend, who, a few feet away from them and comfortably lodged in an armchair as if for life, sleepily, through half-closed eyes watched the dance proceed.

"Listen, Bet. Don't get anyone else here. Has Anne any friend in newspaper work?"

"Don't know. What's the matter with you, Louie?" Elizabeth faced her interrogator with a slight show of impatience, then turning to glare over at the pianist, muttered, "I wish Amy wouldn't pound so!"

"If you don't listen, you'll be sorry. Anne asked me if I knew anyone in the newspaper business—"

"What *of* it?"

"Did she meet anyone like that that you know of?"

"Not anyone of any account. She met my brother Bob a few times. He's a newspaper man. We all went out together—"

"Then it must be Bob!"

Elizabeth, gazing off across the heads of the throng, imperviously whistled a few measures of the tune now being bethumped into a horrible existence by the indefatigable Amy.

"I wonder if it could be!" Lou pulled trenchantly at her lower lip, and narrowed her eyes. "It might!"

"What are you mumbling about?" Elizabeth wheeled round upon her.

"Maybe it's Bob that Anne's in love with."

"What?" Tense hands grasped Lou's arms now, and wide-open eyes challenged hers. "Do you mean to tell me that Anne is after my brother Bob?"

"Oh, please don't be excited!" Lou's heart went weak with the fancy that she had betrayed a sacred confidence. "Maybe it isn't true at all. I didn't really think you'd mind!"

"Mind!" echoed Elizabeth. "Of course, I don't mind. Why should I? With the exception of my little sister and you, I think Anne is the finest girl in the world—even if she does know she's good-looking. Only she's crazy—she's crazy if she's after Bob—"

"Why?"

"Because I'm sure dear Bobbie wouldn't suit financially. Think of the grocer's bills, and coal, and charge accounts for clothes. And what would he ever do about her art?" She stood to catch a glimpse of her possible sister-in-law where the latter posed decoratively near the newel post of the foyer stairway. "But I suppose it isn't my business."

Anne, with a preoccupied glance toward the crowd in the reception room, had turned and was now slowly and thoughtfully ascending the stairs to the quieter region of the second corridor.

The romance thus discovered by Louise offered diverting qualities of a nature to be warmly welcomed in the soul-depressing month of January with its black cloud of examinations rising steadily upon the distant horizon, and finally in the last week settling down like a pall over all students or nominal students, good, bad, and indifferent. In a remarkably brief period, moreover, the two observers of the romance had perceived not only that Anne was "after" Bob, but that Bob was "after" Anne —"hot-foot," to quote his sister.

"One a day," she announced, taking an inglorious pride in the fell accuracy of her statement. "Her mail-box is next to mine, and when she opens it, I see his writing. And she's never let me read them."

Re-enforcing the documentary evidence came telephone calls for Anne, frequent and protracted, between seven and eight in the evening. On two extraordinary occasions, she sent for Elizabeth at Bob's request. His brotherly conscience at these exceptional times was palpably bothering him, for he had nothing of moment to communicate—"just wanted to know" how Elizabeth was.

At length on the second Sunday in February, Bob appeared in person. This was the initial visit to a series interrupted only by Anne's week-end trips home, now occurring noticeably more often than before the Christmas holidays. As for Anne's "little pochades," they lay neglected in her boudoir box. She had become an enthusiast upon the subject of newspaper writing, hitherto deemed by her as worthy of naught but the unqualified contempt of the truly cultured. Her study hours she spent in the library poring over textbooks on journalism and assiduously gathering notes on art in its relation to

newspaper work. On many occasions, however, unforethoughtful of practical problems, she merely sat dreaming with a look of holy happiness in her eyes, wotting not the while that she was furnishing to her more sensible minded friends abundant material for discussion.

"Why doesn't she take more domestic science?" Nell remarked to Louise and Elizabeth one day.

They were ranged quite formally round Nell's green wicker table for "tea." The hostess had served three unaesthetic portions of chicken salad on paste-board plates, had invited her guests to help themselves to the bread and butter sandwiches heaped high on a sheet of theme paper as a center-piece, and had indicated, with a lazy movement of her hand, an agate sauce-pan full of steaming cocoa which stood precariously aslant on the radiator. Her question remained unanswered. The guests had other interests.

"She really ought to take more of it." Nell herself was taking abundantly more of the chicken salad. "She's had only one little course in cookery. Now I intend to be all ready for such an emergency." The guests gazed admiringly at her. "I'll cram in as much home economics as I can while I'm here. Then I'll go abroad. Then when I return—" Nell with deft fingers lifted her fourth sandwich from the pile—"I'll settle down and live happily ever after!"

"Great!" Elizabeth, dazzled by the program, suspended her cardboard fork in air. "You *are* practical, Nell."

Louise agreed with Elizabeth. Unquestionably Nell's life was to work itself out in definite design like the plot of a short story. Nell, stimulated by the gracious cordiality of her listeners, became more confidential.

"I have my future home all planned and interior-decorated. Nothing too expensive, but everything harmonious and in good taste. I'll supervise the housekeeping, of course—"

"When are you going to get the ring?" interrupted Elizabeth with undue eagerness.

"What ring?" Nell looked dully at her.

"Why, the engagement ring, of course!" The tone of the answer plainly implied that no other sort of ring could possibly be imagined by any human being laying even slight claim to an infinitesimal degree of ordinary intelligence.

"Well, isn't she simple?" Nell appealed to Lou. "There isn't even the shadow of a swain on the horizon, let alone an engagement! What I mean is that I'm not going to have any career, or teach, or do anything like that—"

"The cocoa will be cold." Elizabeth discourteously changed the subject, and Nell with her facile philosophy accepted her guest's ill manners.

"I have no cups," she casually announced.

"I have some in my room." Elizabeth rose from the table.

"That's a dear. Get 'em." Nell allowed her guest sufficient time to cross the threshold and close the door before commenting upon the vulnerable points in her character. "She's so unpractical, Louise—so changeable—"

"Not changeable," protested Louise.

"Well, volatile, or elusive, or whatever it is. Look it up in the dictionary for me some day. Won't you? She doesn't seem to have a stable idea in her head. *Mercurial!* That's the word."

"Aren't you horrid? I think she's wonderful!"

"Yes?" The upward inflection was significantly skeptical. "In what, for instance?"

"In dramatics, for example," asserted Lou, scrambling mentally among her concepts of Elizabeth's titles to praise. "She's a genius."

"Conceded." Nell fondly regarded the sandwich pile, contemplating the consumption of her fifth. "Too bad

she didn't make the association. Ever say anything about it?"

"Not much." Lou was loth to disclose to Nell the agony which Elizabeth had endured on that black occasion of the thwarting of her darling ambition.

"I don't understand what she sees in the stage. Do you?" Nell's heavy-lidded eyes gazed disdainfully off at nothing in particular.

"Why—er—yes."

"And I don't think it's a respectable calling for a woman."

At this point in the conversation, the subject of it entered, thus depriving Lou of the difficult privilege of defending the "profession."

"Now, just serve the cocoa, like a dear," drawled the hostess, smiling an approval at the three china cups which Elizabeth held out to her.

The guest acquiesced, but fell a bit short in her generous endeavor by pouring a quantity of the beverage on her hostess' new oriental rug. Lou sprang up to assist her. Nell looked benignly on.

"It's all right. Take that face towel from the rack and dab it up, Louie. You see, Bet, if you would go in for more domestic science, you might learn—"

"Domestic science!" sniffed Elizabeth. "There's nothing *to* it!"

"There isn't?" Nell was almost resentful. "What do you know about it anyway? And what right have you to run down the department?"

Louise rose indignantly from her humble task.

"Didn't you just run down Bet's career?"

"My career?"

Louise flushed hotly, for it was far from her intention to betray Nell. That imperturbable creature, however, smiled an untrammeled smile and observed,

"I said I didn't think the stage any place for a woman."

"What about the movies?"

"You have the most depraved tastes!" Nell calmly sipped her cocoa.

"She has not!" Lou placed a protecting arm round her one and only chum. "I'm sure her ideals are as high as yours, Nell Rawdon. Aren't they, Bet?"

"Higher," laughed the person under debate. "Do you want us to finish the chicken salad, Nellie?"

The afternoon tea proceeded harmoniously and was consummated, at length, to the satisfaction of guests and hostess. Whereupon the latter, quite spontaneously assuming to herself that dispensation from toil which is the privilege of the champion heavy-weights of this world, requested the guests to "clear up."

"I must dawdle along to the bookstore," she said, and, with cumbrous grace, went her way.

Their chore accomplished, Elizabeth and Lou strolled down to Anne's room, and there found the royal occupant reading a letter from the leading man in the newspaper profession.

"Bob has tickets for some play Monday night—Washington's Birthday. He wants you and Louise to join the party. The Frank Royces will chaperone." Louise's heart gave a bound of anticipatory pleasure. "Billy Tucker's coming." Louise's heart sank to its normal place and lower.

"Would you like it, Pollywog?"

"I'd love it." But a swift calculation of the number of escorts in the prospective party, had left in her a slightly depressing conviction of her own supernumerariness.

"Then we'll go. Send Bob our acceptance, Anne. We'll go home Friday night. And, Louie, you've got to stay with me this time.

"I'd love to."

They went, and to Lou it proved an interesting week-end, doubly enjoyable because she was not obliged often to call upon her limited conversational powers. The

Stedmans talked, argued, sang, almost incessantly from the beginning to the end of her visit. Louise experienced some little difficulty at first in keeping track of them, though she was acquainted with Jack, and had met Bob once or twice at college. A shy sort of friendship shortly sprang up between her and the younger sister of the family, whose mental attitude varied from a delighted appreciation of her big brothers' hilarious jestings and a worshipful attendance upon Elizabeth to a supercilious contempt for all her relatives, whom, at intervals, she pithily pronounced "crazy." A baby niece, also a visitor, was the center of attraction after dinner Monday evening when orderly-minded adults would have seen to it that she was in bed. She was apparently bewildered at the number of "uncles" she had inherited, and called out in shrill tiny treble when Billy Tucker appeared for the theater party,

"Oh, Daddy, there's another uncle!"

The boys, including "Daddy," laughed loudly at this announcement, but Elizabeth ran upstairs beckoning Louise to follow her.

"I'll have to consign you to the tender mercies of Billy," said Elizabeth, helping Lou into her coat.

"Oh, keep him yourself. Can't you let me have one of your brothers?"

"None eligible for this occasion. Jack just told Mother that he's going to Mexico tomorrow as an able-bodied seaman. He has to pack tonight. Jim's got to bring his young daughter home—and it's about time he did, too! Bob's going to Anne's. They'll meet us at the theater. Phil isn't quite gallant enough for a visitor. He'll do for me. So you've got to take Billy."

A few minutes before the group set out, Louise heard Jack talking to Elizabeth in the dining-room.

"Why didn't you tell me about this theater party?"

"I did."

"You didn't tell me Louise was to be in it."

"You said you'd be busy packing."

"Who's going to escort her?"

"Billy."

"Bill?"

"Elizabeth, they're all waiting for you," Mrs. Stedman called. And as the theater-goers passed out from the comfortable foyer into the cold night, she added authoritatively, "Remember, I'll sit up till you come back."

"Oh, Mother!"

"Please don't, Mother!"

"Now, Mother!"

The protesting chorus was ineffectual to change her resolution. The "children" continued to comment unfilially upon her adamantine attitude for several moments after they had affectionately said goodby to her. But Louise, in her own mind, differed with them all, thinking that it would be very cozy, indeed, to find her there, their very own mother, waiting for them on their return in that safe warm home.

"Well, anyway, I don't see how you can give up such a nice fellow as Billy Tucker." Thus Lou, with a scarcely suppressed yawn the next morning at seven, as, wearied out from the previous night's diversion, they sank into their places in the train for Convent.

"Take him yourself if you think he's so nice," suggested Elizabeth in a detached faraway voice.

"Why, Bet! How ridiculous!" Lou blushingly laughed.

Elizabeth laughed sleepily in response, and, closing her eyes, prepared for a forty-five minute nap. Lou would keep awake. She needed to keep awake, for in her mind, at Bet's remark, a whole new set of ideas had entered upon a tumultuous, almost brain-splitting activity.

"Take him myself? Why, he's never thought of me! And even if he had, how could I write with Billy or anyone like him distracting me the way Bob does Anne? She'll never paint another picture! I don't really blame Bet for not wanting Billy around. But just the same it's

interesting—though it doesn't help my plot. . . ." She was nodding.

"Newark!" The voice of the guard, a hundred-weight of sledge-hammer loudness, crashed in upon her slumbers.

"Take him myself?" She jerked herself into an erect position, but almost immediately sank back again against the easeful plush. "No. But if Bet would only change her mind! The novel needs him. Now if Anne were only the heroine! No! She really wouldn't do. Perhaps—perhaps, after all, it will have to be a novel without a hero. A novel without a hero . . . without a hero. . . . It was very pleasant to hear Jack grumbling because Bet hadn't asked him. . . . I wonder whether he likes Mrs. Cartright. . . . I don't believe he does. . . . I wonder how long he'll be in Mexico. . . . I wonder. . . ."

The protracted, drowsy wondering drifted into a confused dream of her father and Jack and Cousin Brenda, all of whom were talking noisily but in steady rhythm like the movement of machinery until Mrs. Cartright drowned their voices with a great shout—

"Madison!"

"Wake up, Bet! Class at nine-thirty."

Elizabeth groaned.

"I'm awake. Don't bother me." Her eyes were tightly closed.

Lou's dreaming thoughts resumed their former trend.

"Billy was pretty nice about everything, though. Plots are troublesome things. But they're not the only interesting things in the world. . . ." The landscape became blurry under her drooping eyelids. "Dear me! Isn't it awfully exciting to be growing up and feeling older, and finding life so full of . . ." She rested her head against the train window. The trees were running into the sky now, and mixing with it almost like water. "And

feeling older . . . and feeling . . . and growing up . . . and . . ."

One really cannot organize one's ideas when one is sound asleep.

"Convent!"

The growing up process is forwarded in the freshman year not merely by new contacts and experiences of an enjoyable nature, but by disillusions and hard realizations and humiliations as well. Louise and Elizabeth continued their happy way of friendship, blind to much in the little world around them, and blind, too, to their own perhaps not altogether unselfish contentment with each other's company, until one afternoon Anne remarked, quite in the deliberate manner of one who had long been saving up the idea, that she had heard them characterized by some of their classmates as "unspeakable snobs."

"Ridiculous!" Elizabeth's cheeks glowed hotly; Louise opened her eyes wide in pained surprise. "How could we be snobbish? Look at our families! What have we to be snobbish about?"

To Anne, the slur on her future people-in-law was manifestly unrelishable.

"Elizabeth, you never grasp an idea," she exclaimed with asperity. "This situation has nothing whatever to do with—with social standing or anything like that. I've simply heard the girls say that you and Lou are too exclusive. You trot around together too much, and don't let others in on your fun."

"Rubbish!" One of the sinners was to all appearances unrepentant.

But Louise felt a wave of remorse.

"Maybe we do, Bet. We probably do. And some of the girls are lonesome, sometimes."

"So are we!" Elizabeth, rebel chin in air, slipped her arm through Lou's. "Come on down to my room, Pollywog. I've something to show you."

Mary
Perth Amboy

"Bye, Anne."

Anne acknowledged Lou's attempt at a friendly farewell with a cool lifting of her fine brows and a faint smile of well-bred superiority.

"She gets me furious when she tries to reform me." Safely beyond their censor's hearing, Elizabeth muttered the words, half laughing at her own indignation.

"She meant to help us."

"Yes—but what right has she to talk about detachment?"

"Detachment?" Lou pondered the word, seeking among its somewhat vague connotations in her mind the very special one which might appropriately connect itself with Anne's rebuke.

"Yes. She imagines she's heroic because she and Bob have reduced their letters to three a week for Lent. I'll bet they don't keep it up for the five weeks that are left!"

"For Lent?"

"Yes. You know. Offering it up—a mortification."

"Oh!"

"I've read about detachment in spiritual books." Elizabeth's mood changed perceptibly with the increasing distance between her and her queenly sister-in-law to be. "It would really be rather a zippy thing to try—for Lent. Wouldn't you like to?"

Its zippiness made no immediate appeal to Lou. They had reached the room and had settled themselves in two comfortable armchairs to meditate and argue the subject.

"Nell's giving up novel-reading for Lent," continued Elizabeth. "That's courageous. She reads about one a year. And I know a crowd that's giving up uncharitable conversation."

Lou caught the phrase.

"I suppose we ought to give up something besides candy."

Almost everyone on the campus abstained from candy

during the holy season. A light glowed in Elizabeth's eyes.

"I tell you!" she said. "Let's make a vow to be detached."

Lou shook her head. "I'm afraid," she demurred. "That doesn't seem quite right. We might break it."

"How silly, Lou! We're making the vow so as to keep the practice. Don't you see that we can't possibly break the vow?"

This logical setting forth of the situation impressed Lou little if at all.

"I thought vows were holy things," she observed.

"They are! But the holier, the better," asserted Elizabeth. "Anyway, I don't mean an enormously big vow. I mean just writing down, 'We vow to be detached.'"

Lou mildly expressed a preference for another finite verb, and eventually her qualms of conscience prevailed.

"S'pose you're right, too," admitted Elizabeth. "People shouldn't make vows rashly. We'll call it a resolution. Let's write it down."

They wrote it on a slip of paper, and solemnly placed it within the leaves of Elizabeth's prayer-book.

"It seems a good thing to do, but sort of silly, too," she remarked, then turned with a look of apprehension toward the door. "I hope none of the girls ever find out!"

"I hope not!" said Louise fervently.

"When should we begin?"

"Now, I suppose."

"I suppose it's better to begin now."

"Yes—it's better."

"Well, goodby till Easter." Lou said it mournfully, moving at laggard pace toward the door.

"Oh, don't let's be gloomy about it!" Her fellow ascetic walked over to the window and stared out to no purpose whatever.

"But just think, Bet! Five weeks!"

"Yes!" She turned swiftly and faced Lou, a hand to a haggard brow. "It's dog-awful!"

"Aren't you glad we didn't make a vow?"

"Heavenly glad! If it's too hard, we're not bound to do it. No obligation. But we might try it—for a week or two."

"Aren't we ever to see each other at all?"

"Why not? Sundays don't count in Lent—and—other special days."

"Then we'd better begin. Goodby."

"Goodby."

Louise closed the door behind her—a momentous act, she was persuaded, if ever there was one. She stood, then, ineffectually groping, as it were, in the emptiness of this new spiritual life, and awaiting some inspiration relative to the next step onward and upward. The inspiration embodied itself in the form of Alicia Remon, the tap, tap of whose Cuban heels now sounded unmerrily through the corridor as, with altogether sorrowful mien, she made her way toward her room. She would have passed Louise had the latter not benevolently checked her.

"Hello, Alicia. What's the trouble?"

"Nothing of account." The little Cuban girl attempted to proceed, a brave failure of a smile quivering upon her lips, while her manner plainly revealed absence of hope in Louise as a confidante. Conscience sorely smote the novice in asceticism. Lent had come unquestionably none too soon. Detachment was an eye-opener.

"Please tell me," she begged, catching Alicia by the arm.

The unexpected sympathy overwhelmed its object. Her dark eyes suddenly filled, and, before either could anticipate such a tableau. Lou's shoulder supported a black curly head, and Lou's arm encircled a compact little frame shaking with tragic sobs.

"It is the English." The words were breathed out

chokingly at rhythmic intervals. "I cannot get it! I am so slow about it! And, oh, it is the only thing that I desire to learn!"

Opportunity was certainly never more golden, and buoyantly, swiftly, Lou made it her very own.

"There, Alicia! Don't worry any more. I'll help you. You'll learn it. Don't worry. We'll begin right away. Come to my room."

One hour and a half teacher and pupil toiled—toiled to achieve in that time what a benighted English instructor had in five months ignominiously failed to accomplish. It is true obstacles to instant success, as the volunteer tutor ere long perceived, were not a few. For Alicia's imagination was at a tangent, her fancy had a habit of entangling her sentence-structure, and grammar was her utter despair.

"No one knows much about it anyway," averred the instructor after a futile struggle to illuminate the subject.

"Then let us try poetry," Alicia smiled.

They had begun their task at two o'clock. At half past three Lou was mentally exhausted. She expressed herself, nevertheless, with sincere regret when Nell appeared and asked her to go walking.

"I'm sorry. I'm engaged now."

"Oh, do go, please," her pupil pleaded. "I have learn so much. Do not let me keep you. I wish to study by myself a little."

"You wouldn't like to come along?" Lou's charity was expanding.

"Oh, no! I must study the English while I have the spirit. I'll write something, and perhaps you will correct it."

"Yes, when I come back. Write me a letter, narrating something or describing something."

The definiteness of the assignment visibly inspired the pupil. She immediately seized paper and pencil.

"Yes, dear Louise—narrating something or describing something."

On the walk, Nell and Lou passed Elizabeth companioning the wan and insignificant looking little Mitzie Kumf.

"You and Bet mad?"

"No. We're—experimenting." The answer was halting, reluctant, for Nell, of all persons on the campus, would least appreciate the value of the high virtue under trial.

"You two are the funniest!" she ejaculated slowly. "I suppose Bet is stringing that poor little blade of grass along for all she's worth."

This idea obviously entertained Nell. At any rate, she alluded to it exactly four times in the course of an hour, and unvariedly in terms, if not actually in disparagement of Elizabeth, certainly not in her praise. Lou bristling with resentment necessarily unexpressed and therefore fruitful merely of discomfort to herself, at length reached the extreme of her capacity for enduring vicarious insult. Her pact with Alicia offered an excuse for returning to the dormitory.

"She'll be waiting for me," she told Nell.

"All right. Run along. I like to walk by myself sometimes. Don't have to talk."

Louise, suppressing comment upon the ungraciousness of the dismissal, sped off up to her room. A gleaming white smile and a carefully inscribed sheet of pale pink stationery were the striking features of her welcome.

"I dreamed much of the time, thinking how lovely it was at sea," Alicia said, sinking languidly back into the chair from which she had risen. "How I hope some day you will make a trip to my country!"

Louise examined the "composition." It said:

VERY DEAREST TEACHER;

I will write you about a voyage I went to Cuba once. Had a splendid voyage; the weather agreeable, the sea quiet, and the

passengers very refine and well-bred, so everything make me have a good time. Among the passengers, there, was an old gentleman who is one of the best speakers, so every evening he recited some poems in English and Spanish. My favorite was about some troubles a poor man had in South America; some stanzas from Hamlet were the English ones.

Receive my best love,
ALICIA.

"Good! You have literary taste." The preceptor blushed at her own disingenuousness, but a more callous than she would scarcely have had the heart to dim Alicia's radiant and self-gratulatory smile. "I'll correct this later. That will do for to-day. Now we'll have some crackers and jelly."

"In Lent?" Alicia vainly tried to conceal her horror.

"They feed the brain." Louise uncovered the glass, and proceeded to spread some of Cousin Brenda's unique "Grape" on the soda biscuits.

"I suppose it's no sin," faltered Alicia. "I'm not of age—but Louise, dear, I cannot! I cannot!"

"Some other time, then, when Lent's over. And I hope—" Louise was high on the wings of detachment—"when Lent is over, that you'll come often to our little parties, Elizabeth's and mine. They're awfully nice."

At this astonishing invitation, Alicia laughed a clear merry laugh heart-stirring to hear.

"Louise, you are such a—*simpatica*—How do you say?—such an engaging girl! I know well what you are doing! You are trying to have me feel at ease with you, and I am beginning to feel that way, and if I was really—How do you say?—in friendly relations with more of the girls, I would not care so much about that old English!"

In the presence of this abundant reward, this first fruit of her Lenten resolution, Louise shuffled off the last remnants of the distress she had experienced on making it.

Two days later she met Elizabeth at the door of Santa Rita Hall.

"Fingers crossed," the latter said suiting action to announcement. "This doesn't count. I must tell you something awful that's happened."

Louise agreed to a temporary cessation of their spiritual endeavors provided that the communication were of genuine importance.

"It is. And take warning from it. What do you think? That little tad-pole, Mitzie Kumf, has gone and become devoted to me!"

"How do you know?"

"Well, I've been walking with her some since you and I became detached—she seemed sort of lonely at times—and this afternoon when I went to my room, I found two cream cheeses and a box of crackers. I didn't mind that so much—it was four-thirty, and I'd had five hours of class—but with the donation was a card, and on the card was written, 'To my dear kind Elizabeth from her devoted Mitzie K.' I was as mad as the dickens."

"What did you do?"

"What did I do? What would *you* do?"

"I'd send back the crackers and cheese," affirmed Louise with heavy virtue.

"I couldn't. I ate 'em—most of em."

"Then you'll have to put up with Mitzie, and here she comes."

Leaving her weak friend to her fate, Louise passed in through the doorway and ran light-heartedly up toward her room. She paused for refreshment at the drinking fountain, but the clear water suddenly turned [illegible] on her lips, for from just round the corner she caught the crisp dialogue of voices recognizably belonging to a group on record as eschewing uncharitable conversation during the penitential season.

"Isn't it disgraceful," said one, "the way Elizabeth

Stedman is cultivating that poor little Mitzie Kumf? I never saw such scheming!"

"Yes," contributed another. "Mitzie sends her all sorts of things to eat—cheese and crackers and everything. I had no idea Elizabeth was that sort of girl."

"You can never judge," volunteered a third. "Since she and that conceited Louise Maxon are on the outs, Elizabeth must have someone tagging after her."

Louise waited until the speakers had moved down the corridor. Then she hurried quietly on. Resentment, indignation, and a deep disgust for the higher spirituality temporarily possessed her soul. Also she was slightly piqued at Elizabeth because of the crackers and cheese. Why *had* she eaten them? Rejection of the gift—in a manner kindly, of course, but firm—would have conclusively established her reputation for strength of character, and would have prevented what Louise now in the heat of conflicting emotions pronounced the "guff of the gossips."

Arriving at her room, she pushed her door open with no little truculence and stepped angrily across the threshold. There, however, she stopped, transfixed. They were loveliness itself! Filling bounteously the low crystal vase and reflected in her dresser mirror, they touched everything around them with their delicate beauty—several dozens, at least, of exquisitely tinted sweet peas—white, shell-pink, and faintest violet—set about a center of orchids. Lovely? Yes. But her ears burned tinglingly as she went over to examine the flowers, for, in complete fulfillment of her instant and agonized expectation, attached by a white ribbon to one of the fine green stems was the ominous little card inscribed to *"Very dear Louise, from her sincerely affectionate Alicia."*

Late that same evening, the sister sacristan on coming into her domain found a beautiful floral offering there for the altar. She breathed a prayer for the donor.

"Dear children! They are so self-sacrificing," she murmured.

"Life is horribly complicated," wrote Louise that night in her commonplace book. "It was my duty to give something back to a person, but I couldn't. I gave it for a sacred purpose instead, but I feel like a hypocrite. Besides I was very hard on someone else in similar circumstances. I can't reason this out."

Sunday, after full explanation of the case to Elizabeth, she remarked perplexedly again,

"I can't reason it out."

"Oh, bother!" returned that very intuitive creature. "Don't try."

"But it was right not to hurt Alicia's feelings—wasn't it?"

"As right as the stars!"

Whatever the spiritual fruits of the experiment in detachment, the two ascetics persevered in it to the bitter end. Holy Thursday brought the retreat. Louise remained at college for the three days because the alternative was Atlantic City with Aunt Ellie and Cousin Brenda. Mr. Maxon was in Albany and would remain there until Easter Sunday night.

"That *Cartright* is up there *now*." The underscoring, heavy and black, in Cousin Brenda's letter, showed her to be in no sweet mood over the matter. "My *poor* dear, how I feel for you!"

Since her friends were inaccessibly enwrapped in spiritual recollection, Lou's only sanctuary from the heart-heaviness consequent upon this news from home was *Her Goal*. Working safely there, her imagination could not wander to morose and unkind judgments upon her father—her darling father, who had never in his life uttered a harsh syllable to her, and as she had known him, dreamed solely of her happiness. Doggedly she re-read, tensely she revised, diligently she re-wrote the introductory chapters of the great novel, and for a broad-

ening of her religious sympathies, attended a few of the retreat conferences given by a Jesuit Father in the auditorium. To her on the outside—for she did not actually "make" the retreat—the silence was occasionally depressing. The retreatants, on the contrary, appeared for the most part to enjoy the experience, sometimes—or so it seemed to Louise—largely because of the possibilities it presented to them of inventing unusual methods of thought-communication. Not that the students were lacking in earnestness. Many of the more serious, indeed, walked about as if, exalted to the state of ecstasy, they never more expected to resume the "burden and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world." Lou's own special friends were edifying. Anne was grave and manifestly preoccupied with problems of no slight importance, having selected from the reading-table a little old-fashioned brown volume entitled, *Choice of a State in Life*. Elizabeth, too, was more thoughtful than usual, carrying about with her an *Imitation of Christ*, which she opened at frequent intervals, to meditate sturdily on some chapter designed by Blessed Thomas to force the truth upon one, welcome or not as that truth might be. Nell dawdled comfortably along apparently quite free from misgivings regarding her eternal salvation and evidently planning her place in heaven with as much equanimity and certitude as she had planned her future "interior-decorated" home on this ephemeral planet. When she read at all—which was not often—she read the short stories in pious magazines. Mitzie Kumf for those three days wore the troubled look of one with a weight on her conscience, despite her inseparability from *The Way of Interior Peace*. Alicia, on the contrary, reveled without surcease in spiritual joy—a joy, withal, obviously not prohibitive of languishing glances in the direction of her beloved English tutor.

"I prayed devoutly for you," she told Louise when the retreat was over, "that you'd settle your vocation."

"Settle my vocation?"

"Yes. Don't you think of it sometimes?"

"No—Yes—that is, not exactly in those terms."

"But you should, dear Louise. We all should."

Though the English tutor was for a short space seriously impressed by this excellent advice, she easily forgot it an hour later in the scurry to the train, and in her happy excitement over her father's telegram, which had just told her that he would surely be with her Saturday evening "at home."

And every evening of that week he spent with her, nor could she be persuaded to join any of her classmates or friends in their hectic crowding in of holiday frolics or theater-goings. She went once with Mrs. Stedman and Elizabeth and Margery to a matinee, but immediately afterwards hurried home in a hungry and miserable state of apprehension lest her father should arrive there before her. He did not. And on that evening, as on the others, she was waiting for him and ran to him as soon as, from her vigil place in the library, she heard the front door open. If Laura was uppermost in the minds of those dwelling under the Maxon roof, her name scarcely passed their lips. Once Aunt Ellie had whispered to Lou that her father and Cousin Brenda had had "words" about the lady. But whatever those "words" had been, their effects had passed. And so Louise, grateful for the quiet joy of the present, and hopeful of the future, went rather reluctantly at the close of the vacation back to Convent.

Convent, after Easter, however, for all her disinclination to return to it, presented, to her not unperceptive soul, irresistible attractivenesses of its own—a tang of sweet spring in the country air, little plant blades shooting up in the flower beds near the campus gate, a fresh new greenness over lawns and meadows with a delicate yellow stippling of forsythia here, there, everywhere, and finally a glory of budding tree-tops setting itself in

laughing rivalry against the glory of a friendly blue sky. And, then, Elizabeth, Anne, Nell—yes, even Amy!

Not many days after this returning, on a morning in May, Elizabeth danced her way recklessly ahead of Louise along the walk toward the main building, stepping aside just in time to avoid bumping against that admirably poised sophomore, Adelaide Hoban, who since her advent to college, had inevitably received, and with professional finish enacted the leading rôle in all plays presented by the Dramatic Association.

"Special delivery for you," she smiled, handing Elizabeth a letter. "Sister asked me to give it to you."

She passed on before Elizabeth could gather her wits for a "Thank you."

"Isn't she marvelous?"

"Don't see why. You'd do it for her." Lou's loyalty was unimpeachable.

"I mean in plays."

"Why shouldn't she be? Her father's a stage-manager in New York—"

"I know. And she's going to give up college next year and go on the stage."

"You'd be wonderful," sighed Louise.

Elizabeth had opened her letter.

"From Bobbie. Listen.

'Dear Sis,

I'm up here in Wharton doing specials for the paper. There's trouble in the mines—not much, but enough with the help of the imagination to supply a yard or two of copy. It would be a great place for a trip. Your big brother has some drag with the men. Couldn't Anne, and you, and Lou, and some of the others come up Saturday? It would be good for geology, you know. I'll take you down the mines and to other places. Don't fail to come.

Affect.

Bob.

Anne, in her newest spring dress of limpid daffodil

yellow, was walking dreamily down the slope of green meadow between Santa Maria Hall and the main buildings. The two freshmen, through a series of yodels and beckonings, made her understand that they strongly desired her presence. She came toward them at serene and steady pace, quietly received the note which Elizabeth thrust upon her, read it with immobile countenance, then graciously proffered the information that she and Bob had over the telephone made all arrangements for the trip and that Mrs. Frank Royce would chaperone the party.

"There will be five or six others," she said. "Nell, of course, and these seniors—" From the tiny decorative pocket of her daffodil frock, she drew forth a slip of paper which showed the names of the elect. "They'll do to fill up." She dropped her hands at her side, and lifting her head in air, breathed in the fragrance of the fresh springtime. "Isn't it beautiful to-day?"

Her mood was infectious. Louise joyfully responded to it, smiling happily up at the maze of burgeoning treetops.

"Did you hear the frogs singing last night?" she said.

"You mean the hylas over in that low land where the white birches grow?" Anne broke not the spell of her own ecstasy even so much as by a turning of her head. "I could listen to them for ever and ever. They remind me of—"

"Do we have to bring our lunch—ham sandwiches and bananas and such—to this miners' party?" asked Elizabeth, quite unattuned to the poetic mood of the season.

Anne still distrait, her eyes quietly seeking the distant hills where lay the town of Wharton, repeated the prosaic word.

"Lunch? Oh, yes. Bob always manages that sort of thing."

"A millionaire—yes?"

"Dear me!" Anne almost returned to earth. "I never

thought. I really—Well, I really never thought—I'll just drop him a note and tell him not to bother—"

"And we're going to starve?"

Anne lowered her gaze absentmindedly to the hand-worked design on the collar of Elizabeth's dress.

"Starve? What are you talking about, Bet?"

"Nothing."

But to avert dismal contingencies, Elizabeth that very morning counseled her brother by telephone to be sure, on the day of the projected expedition, to order luncheon for the "crowd."

"Anne won't be hungry, but the rest of us are absolutely normal," she concluded. "So don't forget." To Lou she remarked, "He's as lightheaded as she is."

"It must be nice though," observed Lou.

"What?"

"Oh, I don't know." Louise twisted slowly about on her heels, passing her hands across her too expressive eyes. "I was just—just thinking of something."

Wharton, in the vicinity of the mines, is not a pretty place, though it is high in the hills, and one knows that close by is big beautiful Lake Hopatcong and many smaller lakes no less beautiful, and the Rockaway River winding in and out woodlands and meadows and villages to surprise one at every turn with its rippling picturesque loveliness. Bob, on the Saturday appointed, met Anne's carefully chosen party at the railroad station where his first duty had been to secure a time-table for Mrs. Royce.

"Because you know I've got to be back before six."

"Before six!" protested Anne, darkly frowning. "That means you'll have to leave here around four!"

"Precisely. Frank will be in, and—"

"Oh, it's too bad about him!" ejaculated Anne descending to vulgar parlance—Bob was safely out of hearing distance—and turning to Louise, she remarked with deep feeling, "Sisters-in-law are—are *thorns!*"

After a fortifying luncheon at a roadside inn, the party

drove in jitneys to the desert-like environs of the mine. There Bob introduced his guests into a little shack where they all donned oil-skin coats and caps, and, on their emerging in this regalia, led the way across a sandy waste to what appeared to be the remnants of a battered wooden fence, but which he enthusiastically denominated "the shaft."

To Lou the word sounded ominous, and her apprehensions were apparently shared by Elizabeth, for *she* cried out,

"The shaft? What do you mean? I thought you just got into a little car—like a railroad car, you know, only smaller—and rode along the tracks in a tunnel until you came to a—a sort of big cave, and that was the mine."

"If the company had been informed of your ideas—"

"Don't be sarcastic, Bobbie," Elizabeth interrupted him. "I can't help my imagination, and I'm not afraid of a shaft—or—or—Oh, is that it? That hole? Do we have to go down *that?*"

The party leaned over the railing to investigate. All that they could see was a deep dark opening in the earth extending downward seemingly for myriads of miles. At the head, ready to start with its first consignment of bold adventurers was the rickety box-shaped contrivance misnamed a car to which, with Bobbie steering, they were about to entrust their lives.

"Oh, I never could go down there!" Anne confided to their guide in a frightened whisper.

"There's nothing to be afraid of—really, Nan," Bob returned in gentle accents, and they casually moved off a few paces to deliberate the subject.

"Come! We must hurry." Mrs. Frank Royce stepped bravely in. Louise intrepidly followed her.

The car comfortably accommodated two. "Comfortably" expresses the idea with slight exaggeration, perhaps, for the passengers were obliged to stand, leaning

for support against the boarded sides. All the way down, for three hundred feet, Louise and her companion saw nothing but solid rock, a bit of the earth's crust unpleasantly presenting to their vivid fancies possibilities of cave-ins at least, and actually oozing water which frequently spattered their faces—to the indescribable disgust of Mrs. Frank Royce.

"This is revolting!" she exclaimed. "I should think Anne would have known better than to invite us to such a place."

Three feet above them, Bob, with ropes and apparatus not understood by them, guided the vehicle on its perilous centripetal course.

"Isn't this great?" he shouted.

"Lovely." Lou's voice quavered a return scarcely audible to herself.

Mrs. Royce maintained a severe silence.

At length with a hair-raising lurch of the car, the journey ended in what seemed to be a vast cave dimly lighted here and there and reverberating with a deafening confusion of noises horribly suggesting pandemonium its very self. Bob assisted his passengers to alight.

"The drill-machines," he yelled into Louise's ear. "I'll be down with two more."

He left them there alone in the dark. In the black distance of the uncanny place, however, they were shortly aware of the presence of many silent figures, phantom forms, with preternatural lights flickering at their heads —working with picks and other implements on an immeasurable wall of rock. One of the figures came glooming toward them, mouthing what the visitors assumed to be a speech of welcome—a weird salutatory. At its conclusion Louise distinguished the word "mine" uttered with an interrogatory inflection. She ventured a reply.

"Yes, we're seeing it for the first time," she screamed. "It's awfully thrilling."

"Yes—drilling," he shouted in return.

"There are more coming down." She made a megaphone of her hands and yelled more loudly.

"Dover? Not far away."

This was cryptic. The conversation through unquestionably not without interest had reached a deadlock. Louise desisted from further effort at speech, but clinging to Mrs. Royce's arm, followed their guide hither and thither through the cavernous region, occasionally catching a word here and there of the apparently informative phrases he continued to shout at the top of his lungs. After a delay, in their opinion unreasonably long, Anne and Nell appeared groping toward them in the dark, and finally the entire party was assembled safe and sound. The last to arrive was Elizabeth, alone, with Bob, of course, at the wheel.

"He had me frightened to death all the way down," she shouted into Lou's ear. "I'm going up *three's* with some of you—we can squeeze in—not alone with him again, old smarty!"

"Come on," called Bob, and they all went on following him and the guide round to the several points of interest, Mrs. Royce the while unobtrusively though diligently guarding her charges.

Unhappily for Anne, Bob had to leave them after a little time, summoned to the earth's surface by an important telephone call from the office of his newspaper.

"I'll be down again," he shouted.

The car came back guided by the regular driver who reported that Mr. Stedman had been detained. The party continued to wander about. At length Mrs. Royce said she was sorry, but they must begin to go up because she had to be home at six. Frank would be in and—

"Isn't she maddening, Bet?" asked Anne through hollowed hands.

Bet's answer was lost in the clangor of the drill-machines. She was climbing into the car and drawing

Louise after her. On the way up the regular driver considerately avoided all terrifying comment. Safely arrived, they thanked him from their hearts and hastened over to the little shack where they discarded their oil-skin trappings and washed their hands and faces in the tin basins which one of the workmen filled from a pump nearby. In the course of these ablutions, they had a glimpse of Bob loping over toward the shaft presumably to take his place once more as chauffeur. Gradually the other explorers joined them, a sorry black-faced lot, individually unidentifiable in their long miners' coats and helmets, as, two by two, they emerged from the shaft and made their way over the sandy stretch to the rude dressing-room. The last to trail in were Mrs. Royce and Nell.

"All up?" shouted Bob from the car, removing his cap and carefully running his fingers through his black hair under the erroneous impression that the process was improving his appearance.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Royce beginning to count. "One —two—three—four—"

"How about Anne?" called someone.

"She isn't here," said Mrs. Royce quickly.

"Anne!" It was Bob's voice that rang out now with something like apprehension. "Someone said she came up in the first car with Louise."

"Oh, no, it wasn't Anne, Bob," said Elizabeth excitedly. "It was me!"

At that, Bob uttered never a word, but pulled his cap on with a jerk, cranked the car, and went hurtling down the shaft as if his goal were the molten mass at the center of the earth.

"I'm surprised that he didn't inquire about her before," said Mrs. Royce severely.

"Anne told him that she was coming up first with me," explained Louise.

"I'm very much surprised," reiterated Mrs. Royce.

The party moved spontaneously and in a body to the head of the shaft, and leaning over the railing peered down into the darkness. Mrs. Royce, quite pale with anxiety, began now to indulge in accusations of herself for her negligence with occasional interjections of rebuke for her sister-in-law.

"If she'd only keep her head! It's so uncharacteristic —so unlike what she used to be! This dreaminess of hers! I should have been more alert, of course, but I thought everyone had left when I came up, because you, Elizabeth, said you were coming up three's."

"Don't see what all the excitement's about." Elizabeth's pallor belied her affirmation. "Anne's perfectly safe. Of course, she's safe! Ridiculous! That foreman down there told me he went to our sisters to school in Morristown when he was a little boy! Perfectly silly!"

Her friends, ignoring this disingenuous attitude, continued to lean over the railing venturing many conjectures relative to the possibility of Bob's finding Anne. That he had begun to search for her they were at length assured when the cable stopped. The renewed movement of the cable, moreover, not many minutes later, warranted the conviction that the search had not been vain. Obviously the car was once more ascending the shaft. The more flat-minded of the observing party, from now on and highly to the irritation of the few of superior intelligence, filled the circumambient air with banal surmises anent the situation.

"I wonder how long it will take!"

"I wonder whether they have passed the place where the water just pours into your face."

"I wonder whether Anne was frightened when she discovered that she had been left behind."

All at once for a second time the cable stopped. The portentous occurrence struck even the intellectually inferior into a dead silence. The official driver ambled over

to them. In brisk, nervous peremptory tones, Mrs. Royce interrogated him.

"What does this mean? What is the matter?"

He climbed into the shaft, jerked the rope, and shook his head dubiously. Then through a megaphone, he roared down the abyss,

"Any trouble there, sport?"

There was no response.

"Off the track," he announced, pulling at the cable. "Guess they'll have to climb it."

"Climb it?" A high-pitched chorus challenged him.

"How could they possibly?" Mrs. Royce was thoroughly indignant not only at the idea but at the wretch who had dared to give voice to it.

"See that ladder thing a-runnin' down the track, 'longside of it? Wal, that continyers all the ways down to the very end. If the car don't run right, why all we got to do is to get out an' walk. But it will be tough on the little gal."

And it was tough on her friends as, staring down through the blank darkness, they pictured her—How dear to them now!—climbing up in that subterranean night over a rough slimy passage with only a crudely built ladder between her and death.

"There's Bob, of course," sniffed Elizabeth patting her nose with a tiny wet ball of a handkerchief. "If he brings her up safe I'll never object again to—"

"Hush! You never did," Louise remonstrated in an undertone. "Don't let anyone hear you. Of course, he'll bring her up safe! Of course, he will."

"I wonder if she really minds," Nell ponderingly observed.

"I don't think so," said Lou in accents of unqualified conviction.

"I *see* something!

Cries of joy followed upon Mrs. Royce's dramatic

proclamation. And surely enough, rising slowly from the uncanny depths appeared a head and broad shoulders undeniably belonging to Bob. He was prevented from looking upwards by the dust and dirt that drifted down continually from the walls of the shaft. Moreover, he was keenly concerned with what was coming after him, attached to him by a long line of rope and assisted by him to mount almost every rung of the ladder. When they reached the top, he lifted her out of the shaft and over the railing, then reluctantly stepped back to permit her friends to embrace her and kiss her and hurl innumerable questions at her regarding the present state of her health and spirits as well as the emotions that had possessed her on finding herself abandoned, and the terror inevitable that overtook her when the car left the track.

"I don't know how it happened," she calmly explained. "I suppose I just wandered away from the crowd when you began to go up. I was thinking of how I might illustrate something, say a story—"

"Do you mean the one Bob's writing?" interjected Lou with an eagerness of interest that set Elizabeth and Nell hysterically laughing.

Lou colored embarrassedly at their amusement, but Anne looked coldly through them as if they were nonexistent or at least socially beneath her, pariahs stigmatized by a crude sense of humor.

"I was a little afraid at first," she said, "but the foreman was reassuring, and I knew—I knew someone would remember—and I felt all right—" she lost a noticeable percentage of her aplomb, and ended weakly—"when—when the car came."

And Bob just stood there "breathing sort of satisfied," as his sister afterwards picturesquely related, and mopping his manly brow, all dark streaks now, but exhibiting through the grime the inexpressible joy of his soul.

"You must be terribly tired though," said someone, "from that long climb up the ladder."

"Oh, no," Anne brightly replied. "I didn't mind that part at all. And most of the way—" looking down and once more ending lamely—"you see, I was—helped."

"You'd better go wash your face," said her sister-in-law crisply. "I can't miss that train. I can't keep Frank waiting." She added in low shocked tone to Louise, as Anne hurried over to the shack, "Wearing her heart on her sleeve like that? It's so silly!"

Bob ran down to his hotel to dress, and returned shortly to accompany the party to the railroad station. There they bade him a cordial adieu, thanking him profusely for a pleasurable and instructive day.

"Don't mention it, Miss Rawdon," he said mechanically shaking hands with Nell, the while he peered over her head at another.

"Come on, Pollywog," called Elizabeth. "We'll save places for Nanna and Mrs. Royce. We'll ride home fours."

They boarded the train and secured the desired seats where Mrs. Royce and Anne soon joined them. And promptly, simultaneously with the movement of the wheels of the engine, Mrs. Royce's fancy began operations, increasing in activity proportionately with the swift onward speeding of the train toward the mouth of the Hudson Tunnel, which would lend her rapid transit to the shores of cozy Manhattan. Chiefly of all she pictured a husband, sad and starving, wandering through an empty house—for, of course, in her absence, the "help" would naturally have deserted the premises, and the children would have unquestionably been kidnaped.

"Dear me!" She murmured disconsolately to herself from time to time, glancing periodically at her wrist-watch, and sitting erect—she was on the aisle side—as if ready to leap from the coach immediately upon its draw-

ing into the terminal sheds at Hoboken. "I fear that I shall not make it! Poor Frank!"

Anne, next to her near the window, gazed blissfully off at someone, a center of interest to her in the landscape, albeit, since he was miles behind at Wharton, invisible to any other human eye.

"Anne," said Elizabeth leaning over and patting her hand, "I *was* awful to leave you down there in that horrid black mine. It was my fault. We *had* planned to come up threes. You'll never forget it—will you?"

Anne having barely glanced at Elizabeth for a moment, resumed her contemplation of the fields and woods.

"No, never," she sighed happily. "It was too, too lovely for anything!"

Louise, chin in hand, was also absorbed, enjoying through the frame of the train window the fresh green of the trees and meadows, and humming to an improvised melody a little poem which she had recently picked up and secretly cherished in expectation some day of understanding everything it so beautifully said:

"The air is like a butterfly
With frail blue wings;
The happy earth looks at the sky,
And sings."

"You too, Pollywog?"

She turned at Elizabeth's question.

"Me too?"

"Yes. What are *you* dreaming about?"

"Why—nothing special. But I was just thinking—wasn't it funny? Billy Tucker and your Jack look something alike. Don't they?"

"Never noticed it," said Jack's sister.

CHAPTER V

BILLY IN THE AUDIENCE

LOUISE leaned wearily back against the pillows of her low steamer chair. Mr. Stedman himself had carried it up from the bungalow verandah for her to Elizabeth's room, a little retreat all white and cool, its windows fronting the ocean; and Mrs. Stedman had arranged the cushions and drawn over a wicker table equipped with pen, ink, and paper. These last articles, in a fifteen-minute interval between visits from the various other members of the family, Lou had utilized to write a note of thanks to Billy for rescuing her, the previous day, from an unseasonable death on the Long Island shore where, under protest from Cousin Brenda —though with her father's full consent—she was spending the summer vacation of her freshman year. She let her eyes rest yearningly upon a heap of manuscript—also kindly placed there by Mrs. Stedman. No! This was not the manuscript of her novel. That was home, temporarily laid aside. This manuscript had a fresh, inspired look about it. Elizabeth had cajoled her into writing it, and, of course, it was a play. *Lady Madeline* it was called. The title rôle was to be Elizabeth's when the play was produced at college in the autumn—for naturally it *would* be produced if the authorities dutifully granted permission, and if the legitimate dramatic association, behaving itself with unaccustomed urbanity, withheld all objections to a rival company's entering the histrionic field, and—of all contingencies the chief—if the leading-lady-to-be should pass an examination in a

Latin course in which she was "conditioned." The play itself on the whole was satisfactory, Lou believed, and in this opinion both Elizabeth and Anne supported her.

"The first act needs pruning," she sighed now. "But not to-day."

"Are you feeling all right?" Anne glided into the room, and seated herself on the bamboo boudoir box near the window for a chat.

"Perfect." The invalid's wan smile was far from confirming her hyperbolical reply.

"Well, I have something important to say before anyone else comes—"

"You'd better hurry."

"Yes, I know there are a lot of them." Anne, eyes downcast, gently moved her platinum solitaire round and round the third finger of her lovely white hand. "Bob and I are going to live a way up in the Bronx, though. But I didn't come to talk about that—though you can't imagine how wonderful it is to be settled."

Now what Lou and Elizabeth resented particularly in Anne since she had received her ring in June was this harping upon the one string of her happy metempsychosis into a personage possessed of a definite and important position in life, more especially since her rhapsodies implied an incompleteness in their lives, an unsymmetry that palpably teased her out of thought many a weary night and day. After a time she had ceased to annoy Elizabeth with disquisitions upon the advisability of foresight, for Elizabeth had received the sage and gratuitous counsel at first with laughter, then with an assumption of ennui, later with trembling indignation, and on a very recent occasion with a rude and uncontrolled exhortation to her brother's future wife to "Forget it!" Lou, though not convincingly more amenable, at least listened more courteously. She was not taken unawares, then, when Anne continued.

"I came to talk about Billy."

"Give him this when you see him."

Anne took the note.

"I suppose it's as formal as—"

"It's just thanking him."

"Now, Louise, please pay attention—seriously. Billy's been here two or three times yesterday and today inquiring for you. He's quite concerned, I assure you."

Louise smiled her appreciation, and Anne, eschewing unnecessary delay, availed herself of the roseate moment.

"I shouldn't be surprised," she said quickly and courageously, "if he were *more* than quite concerned."

A frown of uneasiness instantly sketched itself across Lou's comely forehead.

"And you needn't hesitate at all on Elizabeth's account," pursued the director, lowering her voice to a confidential note, "because Bob told me there's absolutely no reason for it at all. I mean Elizabeth doesn't care especially for Billy. In fact—in fact, Billy talked it over with Bob, and Bob told me, and I'd like to tell you, Louie, only—"

"The idea!" The deprecation fell from weakly quivering lips. "As if Bet hasn't told me everything! We have no secrets—"

"Oh, I'm so glad!" Anne was inexpressibly relieved "It's been so hard to keep it a secret with just Bob. For naturally Billy doesn't dream that Bob told me, and Elizabeth would never forgive Billy if she thought he discussed it with Bob, and, as for my knowing it—oh, promise, Louie, please, that you'll never, never tell Elizabeth!"

"I'm sure she wouldn't mind."

"She'd be furious!" Anne glanced nervously toward the open door. "You've got to promise me that you won't tell her that I know—"

"She wouldn't mind—"

"You've got to promise!" In an extraordinary flutter of excitement Anne leaned over and clasped Lou's list-

less hands. "You've got to! I don't care a straw about Bet. But, you see, Bob is involved. Billy told him, and Bob told me, and I pledged my word not to let anyone know I knew, and if Bob should find out that I let you know I knew, and Billy should find out that—"

"Please keep still, Anne!" Louise withdrew her hands and pressed them against her aching head.

"Will you promise?"

"Yes."

"Not even to allude to it?"

"Yes. All right. Anything."

"Bob would never forgive me." The tapering white finger with its treasured adornment once more engrossed her attention rendering her entirely unconscious of the pathetic expression of tormented helplessness in the eyes of the invalid. "I don't really give a straw," she reiterated "about Elizabeth—"

The name died chokingly on her lips, for its owner at that instant entered the room.

"Bob's waiting for you on the porch, Anne."

She rose quickly, and after a swift and satisfied glance into the mirror accompanied by a deft and unnecessary dabbing of her classic nose with Lou's *poudre riz*, sped out and down to the prince of men.

"You look tired, Pollywog." Elizabeth took Anne's vacated place on the boudoir box. "Has her royal highness been preaching?"

"I wish people wouldn't talk so much." Tears stood in the weary-lidded eyes.

"Same here. I wish everybody was Trappists." Elizabeth clasped her hands about her knees and stared out in surly mood at the ocean.

An interval of silence restored Lou's equilibrium.

"I wish we could decide about the duchess," she said.

"Nell would never do, I'm afraid." Bet still stared out through the fluttering curtains at the gray sea. "She's much too stout, and though she *is* blonde, her hair doesn't

glint, and she is not animated. I suppose it will have to be Amy Pasker with a wig."

"I have my heart set on a blonde."

"So have I."

"There must be some stately blondes in our class. Have we considered everyone?"

"All the blondes have bobbed hair." Elizabeth's dispassionate statement of the sore fact contained nevertheless a tragic note of finality.

"I wish Nell could do it."

"She couldn't possibly."

"No—not possibly."

Such ineffectual conclusions invariably signalized their conferences upon that privileged though yet unknown mortal—preferably animated, beautiful, and blonde (glinting blonde)—for whom there lay in wait the glorious destiny of acting a part second only to the "lead" in Lou's *Lady Madeline.*

"Anne would have been nice," affirmed Elizabeth. "There she goes now up the beach with Bob."

"In a wig, yes," assented Lou.

"Of course. Here comes Billy. That's what I meant —with a wig. She's too dark for a duchess. They're standing talking to Billy."

"It's useless to waste time considering Anne. We can't have an alumna in the play, and besides we couldn't arrange the practice. She wouldn't come back."

"She's coming back!" exclaimed Elizabeth, peering out more carefully through the curtains, an expression of suspicion creeping into her countenance. "I wonder why!" She rose slowly, cautiously. "She isn't coming up here for you. She knows you're not able. . . . *Why* is she coming up? Do you suppose she wants. . . . Lou, try to revise that first scene while I'm gone. Won't you?"

She stole with guilty swiftness from the room, and tip-toed her way to the lower floor. Lou heard the

screen door at the rear of the house swing to with a sharp bang as Anne's dignified footsteps sounded their ascent on the stairway.

"Where's Bet?" she asked on entering the room. "Billy wants her to go for a sail with Bob and me."

"I don't know."

"I wish you were strong enough to go, Louise," said Anne in tender modulated tones. "Billy was inquiring for you. He is extremely anxious. And while I'm on the subject, I'd like to make another suggestion." She crossed over and settled herself gracefully once more on the bamboo box. "Of course, you'll see Billy a good deal this summer. He's got to go back to business tomorrow, but he'll be out week-ends. Then when you return to college," she continued peremptorily, "write to him; and above all, invite him to see *Lady Madeline.* He's interested in it already. I tell you," she added, suddenly aglow with inspiration, "let him read it!"

"I will *not!*" The playwright obstinately compressed her lips, a belligerent frown on her white brow and a dangerous glitter in her deep blue eyes. "Don't you ever dare to mention such a thing to him or—or to anyone!"

"Oh, very well. Don't get excited." Anne hastened to neutralize the effect of her unseasonable proposition. "I was only thinking of you. But if you dislike the idea, why, of course, you know best. But you will invite him to see it. Won't you?"

"I don't know. It may never be staged."

"But if it is," persisted Anne, "you'll invite him? So much depends on it," she added murmuringly with middle-aged gravity.

"On what? The play?" challenged Lou. "Nothing at all depends on it but the fun we'll have practicing it." She was loath to have anyone attribute literary aspirations to her however dearly she might harbor them.

"No—not on the play. I mean *of course* on the play, but not as you understand. I mean that so much depends

upon your inviting Billy to see it. And you really owe it to him now. You can't be absolutely an ingrate or indifferent to a person who has saved your life. Promise me that you'll invite him."

"You're always wanting me to promise something!"

"This is for your good. And I know what I'm talking about."

"Are you going sailing?"

"I hate sailing. I'd rather go walking." Anne gazed out for several calculating seconds at the two swains on the beach who stood in friendly chat consoling themselves, each with a cigarette, as they patiently awaited her return. "I'll tell Billy I can't find Elizabeth. But before I go—*will* you promise?"

"Promise what?" Lou provokingly rejoined.

Anne, rising and moving toward the door, humored her as one being ill.

"To invite Billy to the performance of *Lady Madeline.*" She spoke in the carven way she as a senior had deliberately adopted, and, as a senior, had consistently adhered to—though six weeks of holiday had more or less chipped and blunted the carvings. "Your future and his may depend upon it. Its importance is paramount!"

Oh, excellently chosen word! Though timidly shrinking from an everyday use of it, Lou loved it more than innumerable others, and to her, words were precious jewels. Moreover, "paramount" was particularly becoming to the lips of the queenly Anne, standing there in the doorway in a white sport suit of faultless line, her cloud-dark hair drawn away from her face, not too severely one may be sure, but with the restraint of a refined and exquisite classicism.

"If she were only a blonde, what a duchess she would make!" thought Lou.

Anne's perceptions were keen. She noted instantaneously the diminishing strength of the opposing force.

"Will you?"

"Will I what?"

"Invite him."

"Well—yes. I suppose so."

"I knew you would."

She came over and kissed Lou on the forehead, happily unaware that the latter, grasping the chair-arms, was undergoing a violent struggle against an impulse to push her savagely away.

"I'll see you again this evening," said Anne affectionately, and with her wonted grace of manner withdrew her distinctly personable presence from the room.

"So silly!" The invalid sat weakly back for a moment or two, passing her fingers over and over her forehead as if to erase a disconcerting mark imprinted there. "It makes a person feel so silly!" she said again aloud. In the fever of her embarrassment, she seized the manuscript of *Lady Madeline* from the table. "There's one big advantage in it anyway." She had in mind not effusions of the heart but of the pen. "It gets you away from real life." She was palpably confused in her notions of literary art. "It makes you forget. . . . Now, let me see. . . . Let me see. . . ."

She began the perusal of Act 1, Scene 1, with the laudable purpose of revising it, but fell shortly into a very trance of absorption in the setting, the plot, and the persons of her own creating. On and on she read, forgetting her convalescent state, forgetting the uncomfortable spot on her forehead, forgetting Billy, forgetting Anne, until on the fifteenth page she reached a parenthesized but dashingly written stage direction which said,

"Enter the Duchess!"

Ay, there was the rub! *Would* she enter? Some duchess would enter necessarily, but would *the* duchess, the ideal duchess, descend the marble stair-case to the anteroom (*Scene 1*) with that majesty, that éclat, that grace beyond compare, clearly, unquestionably indicated

by the glorified penmanship of the one who had thrillingly dreamed her?

She *did* enter, like a vision from the skies, the very day of the opening of college. The interval between that day and the afternoon subsequent to Louise's compact with Anne anent Billy, the playwright had spent restfully with Cousin Brenda in the Catskills. For this redoubtable guardian of the fate and fortunes of her youngest relative, on hearing of her narrow escape from a briny grave, had swooped down upon the Stedman household and carried therefrom its favorite and well-beloved guest. Preliminary to this exodus there had been some slight veering on Cousin Brenda's part toward acceptance of Mrs. Stedman's invitation to remain till the end of the week.

"It is very courteous of her," Cousin Brenda had remarked in confidence to Louise.

"She's always that way."

"Miss Royce—the one you call Anne—was also very pressing, very," pursued Cousin Brenda, and added, looking up from a time-table which she had been scrutinizing, "Why?"

Louise, to her own horror and vexation, answered with nothing more than a swift blush. Her not unalert observer flew to a deduction.

"A friend—a special friend of yours?"

Lou nodded. "More or less."

"Why so interested?"

"Why shouldn't she be?"

"Is she the one that's engaged to the dark-haired Stedman boy?"

Further nodding.

"And this Billy Tucker—" It was a mere lucky throw of Cousin Brenda's. Lou unreasonably drew in her breath and blushed some more. "Is he around now?"

"No. He'll be away till the week-end."

"We'll get the five-thirty out of here this evening,"

declared Cousin Brenda, reverting determinedly to her examination of the train schedule.

Her decision was not to be gainsaid, and was executed as stated. From the train steps at five twenty-nine, Louise called back to Elizabeth,

"I'll mail you Act 1."

"If you write to Nell, don't say anything about the duchess," cried Elizabeth in warning accents, unconsciously arousing a pardonable curiosity in other passengers crowding to reach the steps near which she stood as an impediment to their perfectly legitimate efforts.

"Goodby!" Louise disappeared through the coach doorway, and Elizabeth, backing hastily away, brought her heel firmly down on the toes of a florid gentleman in brown from whose glaring eyes she fled with a terrified, "I *am* sorry!"

Anne, who had been standing on the edge of the blocked group, hurried along beside the train till she saw Lou's face at a window.

"Don't forget to write to Billy!" The words were articulated distinctly through a delicate trumpet-shaping of alabaster hands uptilting lightly an alabaster face.

"What?" Lou asked with lips and eyes, and made essay, vainly, to open the window, alternately pounding with vigor on the frame, and attempting a strong upward pull, apparently by means of the metal catches.

Anne repeated the injunction in louder tones.

Louise shook her head laughingly in indication of her continued failure to hear.

"Billy!" shouted Anne.

The train was moving out. She walked rapidly beside it along the platform. Lou laughed more, pointing to her right ear and shaking her head negatively. The train moved faster; and faster the royal Anne now ran along with it.

"Billy! Billy! Billy!" she called.

But she was unequal to the pace set by the five-thirty

express. Lou's laughing face framed in the window was suddenly carried far beyond sight, and in a brief minute or two the whole train had sped past, had diminished to a little dark square against the low misty horizon, had become a mere speck, had vanished.

The ensuing weeks were a golden era of peace for the playwright and of exceedingly advantageous development for the play. Free from the distractions inevitably arising from association with contemporaries—the patrons and patronesses of the hotel in the Catskills were either advanced in years or below the age of reason—Lou sat quietly, and, to her heart's content, silently, out on the high verandah, reinvigorating her brain with the contemplation of pine tree-tops and cedar tree-tops and oak tree-tops, and faint rose-violet meadow-lands near-by, and yellow-green uplands and russet-green forests at a distance, and, at a farther distance, indigo-blue hills, and white clouds in a heaven-blue sky. Through all this loveliness of the mountain landscape, there drifted frequently though subliminally, a Lady Madeline with eyes of soft hazel brown and hair also brown and soft and wavy, accompanied by a duchess of vague outline—not altogether satisfactory—hovering in contour between Nell's bulky form and Amy Pasker's erect and well proportioned figure, but ever crowned with locks of radiant gold. Occasionally into the picture there flitted a character or two from *Her Goal*—for it was difficult to dissociate the heroine of the novel from the leading lady of the play, and naturally in each work of art she had her train of background people. Thus pleasantly preoccupied with creative dreams, the author, it must be admitted, rather neglected her social obligations in the way of correspondence. She wrote a few, a very few letters high up there on the verandah of the mountain hotel—one to her father, one to Mrs. Stedman, one to Elizabeth, one to Jack in answer to his from Mexico, and one—oh, no, it was a picture postal card which she

sent to Billy, carrying to his lonely heart—if, indeed, Anne were correct in her surmise—the eminently consoling message, "The scenery is lovely up here. Lou."

Then shortly, the calendar, and the jeweled frost on the yellowing sassafras leaves, and the chill of the house indoors, and Cousin Brenda's hourly communing with the memoranda in her shopping notebook, suggested beyond cavil that it was time to think of going back to college.

Elizabeth went back a day early in order to try her fortune at the required Latin examination. An overindulgent instructor immediately corrected the test-paper and reported its satisfactoriness.

"I've passed!" Elizabeth exuberantly saluted Lou the next day, on her arrival, and added almost without taking breath, "Now we can begin. I met Miss Norton last night, and engaged her to coach us. She's awfully interested. The only thing now is the duchess."

"Let's go over and stand at the foot of the stairway by Saint Anthony's statue and watch the freshmen as they come in. Maybe one of them will do."

"That's an idea! Let's!"

They set out from Santa Rita to the main building, striding purposefully with heads forward and arms swinging in healthful unlady-like fashion. Suddenly they saw coming from the opposite direction Nell and a girl strange to them—strange, and yet ineffably familiar! Playwright and leading woman stopped as if struck by a bolt, a welcome bolt out of the heaven's own blue!

"Oh, Louie!" Elizabeth grasped Lou's arm. "Oh, Louie!"

No need for further expression! Here, walking toward them, unbelievable as the miracle might seem, her blonde hair *glinting* in the sunlight, was the very impersonation of their hopes and dreams! Nell, on drawing near, paused with her companion, to express in formula her wish that they meet "Miss Graham, a sophomore."

"Another classmate for you, you see—transferred from a college in the city," she added. Then quite gratuitously, "Christian name's Fritzie. Funny—isn't it?"

Fritzie's impersonal, artistic appreciation of Nell's tactlessness, an appreciation imparted by a swift almost imperceptible glance of amusement toward Louise and Elizabeth, instantaneously bespoke their comradeship. She was their true congener; she was their friend, and more—oh, infinitely more—she was the duchess!

And she could act! After one or two rehearsals—for she had graciously accepted the part when it was offered to her—Miss Norton, instructor in oral English, pronounced her second to none in the cast—except, of course, "Betty Stedman."

"I've never seen an amateur to equal Betty," remarked Miss Norton thoughtfully. "*She* has a career ahead of her."

This brain-exciting prophecy Louise carefully worked into Chapter five of *Her Goal.* Fritzie also was worked into the story, only as a background person, however, her late arrival upon the scene of the main events excluding her from a more significant rôle.

"Do you think Fritzie will be an actress?" The playwright put the question fairly to the coach one evening where they stood in the center of the auditorium during a rehearsal.

Just sufficiently tall for the demands of dignity, her shining hair and peach-bloom cheeks set off by a dress of ebony silk, the duchess stood in the wide doorway at the back of the stage—at least, one imagined the doorway there, for the visible scene was the unwitherable "woodland."

"Fritzie?" Miss Norton's countenance assumed a judicial expression. "Fritzie? I think not. Fritzie will surprise us all. She will do the unexpected."

"She'll become a nun, perhaps," suggested Louise. "You know she's quite serious."

"No. I'm not certain about that either," said Miss Norton.

Lou was impressed. In the course of the several subsequent rehearsals, therefore, she assiduously studied her new classmate for symptoms of that startling future which her personality undoubtedly implied. (Miss Norton had said so.) Futile endeavor! Lou was fain at last to desist from it, sensibly deciding that whatever Fritzie's character might subtly conceal in the way of amazing destiny, it was silly to waste hours in consideration of the occult when the manifest, the undebatable, was so thrillingly present. For Fritzie was incomparably *the* duchess! What the play might have been without her Lou shuddered to imagine. With such a duchess, however, and with such a Lady Madeline, any play would be successful—that is, any play after it had been cut, revised, re-written, cut again, revised again, and again, and again. . . .

"It won't be my play at all," she almost sobbed one rehearsal night.

"Oh, yes it will," blandly returned Miss Norton, adding with kindly intent, "Even plays that are worth while have to be torn to pieces and put together again this way."

Lou stoically swallowed the insult, but, when Miss Norton's back was turned, slipped out of the auditorium and over to her room there to indulge in exactly two minutes of humiliated weeping. From this spell she emerged with heart, temporarily at least, hardened against the dramatic world.

"Who cares?" she dabbed indignantly with her handkerchief at her weakly offending eyes, tossed the crumpled bit of violet linen with indifferent gesture on her dresser top, dragged over her stiff little chair to her nice little bird's-eye maple desk, opened the drawer thereof, and lovingly therefrom drew the battered manuscript of *Her Goal.*

"This is to be my very own," she said, still with a tiny choke in her voice. "I don't care a rap about the old play!"

But she did, of course, and was more excited even than the members of the cast when, at six-thirty the evening of the performance, the direful word went round that everything was in readiness *except* the cat (an important accessory) and one of Fritzie's gowns, the very special one she was to wear in the second and third acts. This latter deficiency arose from the perfidious conduct of a dealer in costumes, a being dehumanized and godless unquestionably, who had sent for the duchess an outlandish seventeenth century garb, hideous with red and yellow brocade, a shabby ruff, and ugly quilting; whereas Evelyn Parker, mistress of the robes, with moist eyes and flushed cheeks, almost made oath that she had ordered an artistic Empire creation.

"But my goodness, Ev," Elizabeth burst out, thoughtless of the psychological crisis, "don't you know this is a thirteenth century play?"

Evelyn, entirely crushed by this blunt-edged rebuke, darted from the group, radiating the very atmosphere of hysterics. Miss Norton put out a hand, however, and gently detained her.

"I have a gown in my trunk. It will do. I wore it a long time ago at dramatic school."

And what a gown it was! In contemplating it, Evelyn forgot Elizabeth's unjustifiable harshness, and Elizabeth, in ecstasy, leaned for support upon Evelyn's shoulder. As for Lou, she remembered nothing of the misery of rehearsals or of Miss Norton's straight-forward, feelingless criticisms of the play's construction. Author, cast, and coach stood gazing in one harmonious trance of admiration at their marvelously lovely duchess in that marvelously lovely dream of a dress of soft heavenly filmy white and heavenly filmy delicate blue.

"Woven in some far off 'golden crevice of the sky,'" murmured Elizabeth.

And Louise added in thought, a trifle superfluously perhaps, "By the angels!"

"Now," observed Elizabeth reviving and speaking an earthly language, "the only hitch is the cat."

The cat was Tibbs, a yellow pussy of mild and retiring disposition belonging to Anne, having been sent by her that morning in a basket all the way from Manhattan. At five o'clock he had been tried out on the stage (where at the several places of his projected activity saucers of milk had been considerately set), and at six he had disappeared. Elizabeth and Louise had consumed an anxious and fruitless hour searching for him.

"Some of the seniors have gone for another beast," Evelyn Parker consolingly remarked.

At fifteen minutes before curtain time, Nell Rawdon, a generous soul in emergencies, sauntered into the dressing room with a great black creature of the feline race in her arms.

"Answers to the name of Barnum," she said. "Belongs to the gardener's wife, and she says please to be careful of him because he's used to kindness. He's like one of the family, she says, and she'd rather he wouldn't be on the stage except when it's absolutely necessary."

"He'll be all right." Evelyn excitedly assumed the responsibility for Barnum's well-being. "When he isn't needed to walk around the stage, the old black felt hat can be him. Only when he has to be thrown out by the porter, he can't be the hat—"

Nell, realizing that the mistress of the robes was slightly overwrought, controlled her own feelings, only remarking with a look of pain in her eyes,

"*Would* you mind explaining?"

Elizabeth and Louise left the twain to what promised to be no pellucid discussion of Barnum's rôle, and found

their way through a maze of medieval damsels and long-tuniced esquires out of the dressing room and up the stairway leading to the stage.

"Poor Tibbs!" Elizabeth said moaningly. "Where could he be? Anne will rave if he's lost. Bob gave him to her. Poor fellow, he must be awfully hungry. He may be caught behind some radiator and getting burned, or hanging by a rope somewhere, or stuck in some pipe—"

"Please, hush!" said Louise almost weeping. "Don't think of such dreadful things! I wish I were with him wherever he is!"

"Stuck in some pipe and starving?" They had reached the head of the stairway, and at Lou's protestations, Elizabeth wheeled round to face her.

"I wish I were away from here! I wish I had never written a play!" The approach of curtain time quite sickened the author with its thousand possibilities of failure and ridicule. "I was a fool to write it!"

She stepped aside to permit a bevy of uncomfortable looking medieval ladies and hot, nervous-looking knights to pass. Miss Norton was directing them to their various posts behind the scenes or on the stage.

"Even if he isn't scorched, he must be hungry," mused Elizabeth holding with anguished eyes the also anguished eyes of the author.

"Miss Stedman," called Miss Norton in sharp tones, "you're keeping us all waiting!"

"*Miss* Stedman! Right-O," responded the leading lady making speedily for the wings, but calling back over her shoulder, "You're going down front—aren't you, Lou?"

Lou gave her little characteristic shake of the head. "No, I thought I'd stay up here behind the scenes."

Elizabeth returned a few paces.

"Aw, Louie, please go down front and watch it, and tell us all about it afterwards."

"I don't want to."

"Aw, Pollywog, please. And listen to what people say about it."

"Well, maybe I will. I'll sit at the end of the first row. I can—"

"Betty Stedman!" Miss Norton's voice was calm, cold, and convincing.

The leading lady, eyes downcast to avoid the trenchant rebuke in those of the oral English instructor, skipped hurriedly out to the stage, while, Louise, actuated partly by her desire to oblige her friend and partly by an instinct for self-preservation—for Miss Norton was now striding into the wings—stole out through the stage door to the auditorium. She found a place at the end of the first row, not however, before she had glimpsed a familiar group straggling up the center aisle—Mr. and Mrs. Frank Royce, and Anne, and Bob, and Billy—who were arriving, with a nonchalance almost unforgivable, at the very last moment. They might have been a little more eager, Lou thought, considering the circumstance that she and Elizabeth were so vitally involved in the performance. She had scarcely pronounced this mental judgment when the curtain opened.

For the first few wearing minutes, she was conscious only that she was suffering from an unpleasant chilliness. She was cold and nervous. But those few minutes passed at length, and recalescence set in with the establishment of a complete understanding between cast and audience. The author of *Lady Madeline* sat back relaxed and glad of heart, for Act I was going forward apparently without a flaw, though twice Louise became aware of a certain preoccupation in the heroine's manner. Once, indeed, when her lines demanded a particular vivacity of mood, her eyes had lingered with pained anxiety upon a saucer of milk carelessly left by a freshman stage-hand outside the curtain line down near the footlights in Lou's direction.

"I wish she wouldn't!" At this point the author had difficulty in controlling a pulse that quite threatened to leap out of bounds.

In spite of a heroine distrait, however, Act 1 earned entirely gratifying not to say unusually protracted applause from the cordial spectators. Also Act 2 held them in friendly disposition. The end of Act 2, the climax of the play, showed the duchess and Lady Madeline alone on the stage—the duchess, bright-haired and lovely in her gown of heavenly blue, standing up center on the marble stair-case looking back over her shoulder, with a hauteur inexpressibly becoming, at Lady Madeline who, turning away from the vision of beauty, was herself a bewitching figure in a smart little riding dress and a hat of russet brown.

"But the duke has commanded it, Lady Madeline!" The duchess spoke in the imperial manner of her type.

Lady Madeline smiled in triumph, albeit engagingly, as at a goodly jest. "The duke? The duke, Madame, has left the country, and has given his word to my lord never to return!"

Upon this crisis the curtain closed. Once more the audience applauded spontaneously, with genuine appreciation, and for a satisfactory length of time. The duke's departure undoubtedly furnished a mighty suspense. No one except the initiated could possibly foretell the denouément. Naturally every person in the auditorium—with the exception of the decadents and intellegentsia, and of these there was a mere and negligible sprinkling—was keyed up over the situation. All at once, however, as an interruption to this breathless pause, through the great crimson velvet stage draperies, Elizabeth stepped forth. She bestowed not a glance upon the "house," though some heartily disposed members thereof began to clap. Her objective was the saucer of milk near the footlights. She reached it, knelt swiftly to lift it, and as she did so, whispered audibly to Louise,

"The cat came back!"

The heartily disposed members clapped louder, and were joined by others and still others. Elizabeth ignored them all. Clutching the long skirt of her riding gown in one hand, and with the other holding high the ill-merited supper of the truant Tibbs, she hastily retraced her steps across the front of the stage and disappeared through the crimson curtain.

This extemporaneous interpolation, obviously a subtraction from the unity of effect aimed at so conscientiously in the writing, in the coaching, in the lighting and costuming of the play, embarrassed and mortified and distressed the author to a degree realizable only by those who have suffered similar experiences. She might have saved herself all perturbation of spirit, however, for the audience—apparently an under-intellectualized assembly—after due enjoyment of the interlude, returned with facility to the fit mood for response to the drama proper.

Fritzie, still wearing the gown of cloud white and blue, opened Act 3. She sat in an antique mahogany chair near an antique mahogany table, absorbed in a letter she was writing (evidently to the duke) her graceful head bent over, her hair glinting in the shaft of sunlight which came through an open window nearby.

"Golden glow!" exclaimed a man behind Louise.

"And it's natural," chimed in a woman's voice. "You can tell it isn't a wig or peroxide. But that dress! It must have cost at least twenty-five dollars to rent it. Would you think the nuns would permit such extravagance?"

The man grunted in dissent with the speaker.

"As for that girl who came out for the saucer of milk," the woman continued, "she was decidedly forward, I should say."

"Fiddlesticks, Sarah!" growled the man.

"Who's the author of this play, anyway? Do you know?" the woman asked.

To Lou at this moment the stage became a blur of light.

"One of the students. Here's her name on the program—Louise Maxon."

"Pretty good, I should say—for a girl," the woman reluctantly commented. "Probably the nuns worked it over for her—or more probably she haunts the theaters. An ultra type, I suppose, or aping the ultra—though the play's far from it—in fact, too far. But then in the thirteenth century people weren't ultra, I suppose. I'd like to see that girl. I'll wager she looks—"

Louise did not hear the last phrase. She waited just a little while more; then, since the end of the play was impending, she rose quietly, went up to the stage door and in behind the scenes. Elizabeth was standing in the wings with Tibbs in her arms.

"It's going very well," whispered Louise.

"Good!" Lady Madeline could not wait for a detailed criticism, for her cue was about to call her. She thrust Tibbs at Lou with, "Hold him till I come back," and hurried out to her important part in the finale.

Admirably repressing a congenital impulse to hurl the clawing little yellow creature from her and run, Lou betook herself with him to a seat at the head of the stage stairway. His restlessness occupied so much of her attention that she missed the concluding situation of the last act, her favorite in the whole play. Forgetting him, she had been entranced for a brief second or two by the beauty and the low rich voice of the duchess, to be rudely reminded of her duty by the sight of his wriggling little self slithering down the stairway. She dashed precipitately after him, seized him valiantly, slapped him soundly in retaliation for a scratch on her hand, and bore him in triumph upstairs again. The curtain had closed. Elizabeth ran out to the wings.

"Give me the darling!" She had Tibbs in her arms once more. "Poor old dear!" She gently stroked his

head. "He had stage fright. Where do you suppose I found him, Louie? Up on the top of the window behind the big main drop. His eyes were so green and gleamy that I was afraid of him at first, but when I brought the milk and coaxed him a bit, he jumped down. And so we've decided to be friends ever after."

"They want the author," Fritzie called.

"Come out, Louise," said Miss Norton walking toward the wings.

"I don't want to." The author shrank back.

"Nonsense! You've got to." Miss Norton employed her sternest tone. "Don't be a child!"

Louise in a tremor of shyness went forward. Two of the cast held the curtain open for her while she stepped out, and bowed responsively to the kindly and enthusiastic applause. With incomparable poise she leaned over the footlights to receive from the hands of the ushers three great bouquets of long-stemmed pink roses, all the time wondering whether or not her appearance was very, very "ultra."

Fritzie and the others surrounded her when she came in, congratulating her on her success in high-pitched tones of good fellowship, and exclaiming at the beauty of the flowers.

"Who from?" shrilled Amy Pasker.

"One from the cast," said Fritzie holding up the white card.

"And one from the class," said Alicia, and her smile of worship for Louise was frank and utterly sincere.

"And one from Billy Tucker." Amy, after investigation, baldly made this last announcement.

At this point, Anne, with the privilege of an alumna, hurried out to the group from the wings which she had entered by the stage door.

"Wonderful, Louise! Marvelous!" She feelingly kissed the blushing playwright. "But now," she added,

"I'm going to steal you away from all your admiring friends. I want to have a talk with you."

"I'll take your flowers to the chapel for you," volunteered Alicia.

"Please." Louise dazedly consigned the three great bouquets to the outstretched arms of the beaming little Cuban girl.

"Billy's?" Anne seemed positively stunned, though absence of complete paralysis was attested by the sidelong glance of indignation which she darted at Alicia.

"Why not?" Alicia was already moving away, oblivious of the annoyance to which she was accessory. Louise, still dazed, was incapable of a decision. "God owns all flowers."

The unimpeachable truth of this statement rendered Anne wholly dumb for a moment or two, during which saving interval Alicia trotted off through the wings and down the stage stairway.

"It's all right, of course." Anne spoke hesitatingly, unwilling that her words should operate to the disedification of Louise—a non-Catholic. "It's perfectly all right to send them to the chapel. But—" in an aside inaudible to the rest—"I thought it might be nice to let Billy at least see you with his."

"Now, don't begin that," implored Louise, frowning pitiably.

"Come out here with me." Anne drew her out through the curtains and down the steps leading from the center of the stage to the body of the auditorium. "Now, listen!"

Whatever was to follow upon this prologue was necessarily deferred, for just here Elizabeth, having spied them from the stage-door, ran over to them.

"How did you like it, Nanna?"

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" She glanced about the hall as if searching for someone upon whom she might conveniently bestow the intruder. "Wonderful!"

"Did you miss Tibbs?"

Anne became attentive.

"Yes. Why didn't you use him?"

"We lost him. He ran away—"

"Lost him? Ran away!" The somber eyes glowed dangerously. "Do you mean that my Tibbs can't be found?"

"Keep cool," exhorted Elizabeth. "He's in behind the scenes, safe and sound. Mitzie Kumf's minding him."

"I'm going right in and get him." She left them abruptly.

"There's the rest of the crowd." Elizabeth waved to Mr. and Mrs. Frank Royce and Bob and Billy who were moving toward the door of the auditorium. "Come on, Lou." She darted off up the main aisle.

Louise stook stock still, bewilderedly contemplating a means of escape from a scene possibly holding for her unwished-for complications. The regular exit was blocked, hopelessly blocked, by the audience at large and by Billy. The stage exit was even more hopelessly blocked by. . . . No, here she was, coming back now, carrying Tibbs curled up in his basket.

"I wouldn't lose him for the world." Anne petted the basket affectionately. "Where's Bet? Oh, I see her—over there with the boys. I'm glad I have you alone. I want you to listen sensibly. Have you written to Billy since college opened?"

"No. Why should I?"

"Well, you should. Now, listen, and be sensible. You're not standing in Bet's way at all, and Billy's a fine fellow—"

"Oh, please keep still!" Louise put the backs of her hands up to her eyes.

Anne was persistent.

"Don't you think you're rather inconsiderate? Here I am so thoroughly interested, and I know Billy cares—"

She glanced over to where he was talking and laughing with Elizabeth.

"He doesn't!" Lou's head was drooping now, and her hands were still pressed against her eyes.

"If you've made him care," pursued Anne severely, "and then turned away from him, why, I think—I think you're awful!"

At these words, all joy consequent upon the evening's success, all lightness of heart, all sweet peace of soul instantaneously sped out of the life of Louise Maxon, sophomore and playwright. She raised her head quickly, and stared with horror-stricken eyes at her mentor.

"Oh, Anne! I didn't! Did I? I *really* didn't! Are you sure?"

Anne's delicate lips were pressed together. She nodded her head.

"It's most unfair to Billy," she made answer.

Lou's throat grew very tight.

"I haven't even thought of him!"

"That's just it!"

"We've been so busy with the play. I haven't even thought of him. I'm sure you're wrong."

"I'm not."

"What can I do about it?"

"Come over now, and at least be a little gracious when you speak to him."

"I don't want to. I'm going to Santa Rita."

"Louise! That will make the situation ten times worse. You just come and act sensibly."

Miserably reluctant, the villainess followed the inexorable guide and guardian of her heart to the group at the other end of the auditorium. Arrived there, a chorus of congratulation greeted Lou. Billy especially was unaffectedly generous in his praise.

"I didn't know you could do anything like that." He smiled at her rather amusedly, she fancied. "And the

cast was all star. Bet," he continued, turning in brotherly fashion to her, "you were corking. But there was a girl—" he raised his head straining to see over the crowd —"Where is she?" In his eager searching, he lost all consciousness of the presence of others. "She was absorbing! I'd like to meet her. Oh, there she is—near the stage!" His face was radiant. "Bet, won't you introduce me to her? The one that was the duchess, you know—please!—that beautiful one in the stunning blue dress with the glorious golden hair!"

"Fritzie? Let's get her over here." Elizabeth went several steps in Fritzie's direction, waving to her a beckoning hand. Billy still blissfully engrossed, followed Elizabeth, thus unwittingly turning his manly back upon Anne and Lou.

In the shock resultant from this unforeseen change in the tide of affairs, Anne stood with parted lips, staring like a maenad in marble after the recreant cavalier. Mrs. Frank Royce, anxiously fumbling in her hand-bag for a time-table, was addressing her husband and Bob in the wailing notes of a minor scale, on what was to her a perennially nerve-wracking subject.

"We *must* not miss this train!"

The two gentlemen simultaneously directed their chivalrous endeavors to the assuaging of her fears.

Anne turned slowly, closing her lips upon a suspiration which was neither a sigh of resignation nor a half-sob of defeat, but a curiously palpable indication of some new conviction.

"That's the man of it!" she muttered, but her eyes, as she averted her look from Lou to Bob, belied the unmitigated generalization. "Shall we get the train?" she asked him, an artificial brightness in her tone. She passed Tibbs in his basket to Lou with, "Would you mind holding him for a moment?" and crossed over to be assisted into her brown, fur-trimmed and superlatively becoming broad-cloth coat by that striking exception

among men, who singly proved the regrettable rule of their perfidy. Louise, for want of conversational opportunity and to spare Anne further and unnecessary confusion at this ignominious termination of a carefully organized campaign, bent her head over Tibbs in his basket, and blinking in comradely-wise murmured for his ears alone,

"We're happy—aren't we, Tibbs?"

But Tibbs, his eyes mere tiny slits in his little yellow sphinx-like face, purred back an answer altogether non-committal.

CHAPTER VI

A WEEK-END AND A HOLIDAY

OPINIONS relative to the value, cultural or recreative, of week-ends on the campus presented a striking diversity, a diversity due in large part not so much to a meditation of the abstract problem as to modifying conditions which included, among others, age, constitutions, tastes, bank accounts, the attitude of parents and guardians on the subject, and the weather. Which all goes to prove that, even in an atmosphere presumably academic, qualifying conditions and the complexities of human nature outweigh the learned deductions of the theorists. Moreover, a graceful wave of the hand can, at any given moment, consign all theories of all theorists to their proper limbo. And (to expatiate more profoundly upon the question) opinions are wont to vary.

"Nothing to do from Friday till Sunday night!" Amy Pasker pulled her showy fur-coat about her, and glanced in scorn at the cravens who had decided to remain. Some of them, indeed, experienced a momentary distress at her remark, for this special Friday afternoon in November, dull and cold, made one think with a yearning kindness of the home fire-side. "Catch me staying!"

Anyone of her compeers inclined to catch her in her unaesthetic sprint down the hill and over to the railroad station would have aimed at a result as impracticable as, in Elizabeth's judgment, it was undesirable.

"Who *wants* her to stay?"

"Pussy!" murmured Fritzie in rebuke, but laughed sympathetically just the same.

"I'm not. I mean her or anyone—barring, of course, you and Lou, and a few others. I *like* it here Saturday. It's divine to wander about when the crowd's gone, and potter around one's room, and mend a stocking or two, and feel virtuous about it, and all that."

"I like hiking up to Morristown on Saturdays," owned Fritzie, "and buying a few little things in the shops, and feeling that I'm not extravagant—because if I had gone to the city I should have spent more. And, oh, I do like having something to eat in some little tea-room, and then coming back here and feeling that I belong. I'm always a bit thrilled, you know—especially if it's toward evening—at the first glimpse of the towers from the main road or the trolley."

"It is heavenly!" The grayness of the day was impotent to subdue Elizabeth's buoyancy.

At the mail-boxes in Santa Rita Hall, they came upon Alicia.

"Hello, Aleesh. You going to be here for the week-end?" Elizabeth found two letters for herself, and one in Louise's box.

"Of course! Where can I go? In New York I have only my guardian who is guardian for ten others. But I do not mind it when Louisita is here. And tomorrow we shall have breakfast late—she and I—in the Little Flower Tea-room. She has promised, and I shall make the coffee."

"I'm coming, too."

"Yes?" The lifted eyebrows and the strained smile were a gallant though futile attempt at cordiality.

The uninvited one laughed, entirely satisfied that her announcement had produced the designed effect.

"No, I'm not, really. Fritzie and I intend getting up early for Mass. We'll have breakfast in the dining-hall, potter around lazily all morning, and hike off somewhere

through the country in the afternoon. Isn't that so, Fritzie?"

"Pardon me? What? The afternoon?" The calm blue eyes looked up from their perusal of the closely inscribed letter in her hand. "I think—I think I have an engagement."

"Billy coming to-morrow instead of Sunday?"

Fritzie nodded smilingly, accepting the frank intrusion as quite a matter of course.

"Then let's plan the morning."

Up in her room, Louise stood leaning idly against the window-side, and gazing out in comfortable dreaminess at the uncolorful picture of the campus. She had had a gratifying day, and had returned from English class just a few moments ago rejoicing quietly in the assurance that a writer's endowment—however limited that endowment might be—was unquestionably hers. The English instructor had used the word, "vocation." "It's probably to be your vocation," she had remarked. Now, on the campus, this word, "vocation," was strictly reserved as a synonym for a call to life in a religious community. "She has a vocation," said, for example, of any student, meant that a few years—possibly a few months—would see her garbed in the black and white habit of a Sister of Charity, or mayhap in the gray or brown or blue of some other order devoted to high service. The English instructor's identification of the traditionally sacred word, therefore, with a career, an author's career, had a stimulating and a rather pleasantly mystifying effect upon Louise.

"I ought to be writing now!" The thought came to her in no feverish spell of fine frenzy—for she still leaned idly against the window-side—but with just a lazy consciousness that pen and paper were all she needed in her present state of mind to send forward *Her Goal* at least ten pages toward the climax. "This weather is

made for writing. It's so deliciously dull, and there's exactly the right chill in the air." Her feet felt cold, and her nose felt cold, and her eyes were moist as if she had been crying. The last fact she noted particularly. "But I haven't," she mused, "and I'm mentally at ease." She took pride in this analysis of herself. "I'm so glad the week-end is here! I'll have all day tomorrow, and Sunday—though I suppose Cousin Brenda would say it was sinful to write on Sunday. I must talk to Bet about it. And I *must* hurry and finish my novel." She stood erect now, away from the window-side, a clenched right hand, index of sudden determination, striking an open left hand in marching tempo and rhythm. "When it's published—" The hands at first so spiritful, impulsively broke ranks just here, and went up in charity to cover an embarrassed countenance. It was pure conceit to hope for publication! There was a moment of halting confusion. "But it's for Father!" The hands came down, and sought peaceful occupation with the little pendent ornament, her father's gift, which today she wore about her neck on a narrow black ribbon. She rested once more against the window-side, crushing ruthlessly the blue draperies. They were wholly unpresent to her. She saw only one dear face smiling in tender joy at her achievement. "He will be so, *so* pleased!"

She barely recognized Elizabeth's knock at the door, but turned with a mechanical, "Come in."

"A letter for you, Pollywog. I have two. And what do you suppose? Jack is home. He's had enough of Mexico and of being an able-bodied seaman." Louise slowly drifted back from author-land. "He's coming up to see us tomorrow." She went toward the door. "I'll be back again in a few minutes. You know I promised Nell that I'd meet her in town at four o'clock at that vocational school. She had to go in to observe, poor old pedagogue! I've got to tell her that I've changed my mind about meeting her. Glad it will be over the wire."

"They teach people to find their vocations in that school. Don't they?" Lou had begun casually to open the envelope of her letter.

"Get 'em ready to make money in some way—that is, as far as I can judge, and I've visited the place three times."

"Well, they have to live." Louise was really not interested in defending the institution under discussion. "This is from father," she added irrelevantly.

"Yes, but why 'vocational'?" Elizabeth's rejoinder was uttered merely in the spirit of academic debate. "Why not 'commercial'?"

Louise, unattentive to the line of argument, fixed curiously brightening eyes upon her opponent.

"I think I know my vocation. I've talked about it with Sister Margaret. I'll tell you about it when you come back."

The opponent for a second stared in mute stupefaction.

"Your *vocation?*" she managed at length to repeat.

A downward nod answered her.

"All right." Failure to recover one's self immediately under the circumstances might imply the reverse of a compliment. "Do tell me when I come back." She hurried off to the telephone booth.

She was gone for perhaps eight minutes. She returned all expectant with gait immensely cheerful. Nell had evidently been unaware that she had been slighted or had anything to forgive.

"I had a dumb afternoon," she had reported, "watching poor little East-siders cooking and sewing. I don't quite get the idea of this place. I'd call it an Americanization plant," she had added wearily.

"Well, isn't that a good thing?" Elizabeth's magnanimity had flowered from a feeling of relief at Nell's mildness over the shattered engagement.

"Certainly. But why 'vocational'? Not that it matters. Nothing matters. I'm dead tired. I'm staying

with Anne to-night. Wish I were going back to my own box-spring. Thank your lucky stars you didn't come. Goodby."

"Lou!" Elizabeth stood halting in the doorway of the room.

Louise was still there at the window, gazing out apparently, but her hands tensely grasped the blue draperies, her arms wide-stretched, and her square straight shoulders moved as with rapid heavy breathing. Her father's letter lay on the floor.

"What is it, Lou?" Elizabeth, knowing intuitively what it was, could yet think of nothing else to say.

"Don't—don't speak."

The husky-voiced entreaty set up a rampart between them for several seconds. Elizabeth remained fixed to the threshold. At length Louise turned round, white, and wearing a rather bitter little smile on her child-like mouth.

"Don't take it that way, Pollywog!" Elizabeth went swiftly forward to her.

They sat on the edge of the couch, Lou's hands rigidly clasped, Elizabeth's arm, expressing a securely unenervating minimum of sympathy, round the drooping quivering shoulders.

"And I'm to go home this week-end to see them!" Lou said it with what began as a hard, grown-up sort of laugh but ended in a dry gulping sob. "Two weeks ago it was."

"Two weeks ago?" murmured Elizabeth pityingly, and hating herself for her uselessness.

"He meant to tell me—before—beforehand, but Mrs. Cartright—" Lou's lips faltered. She pressed them together with a long indrawn breath. Her attitude was to be stoic. She had resolved upon that. Tears were for people who had no real griefs. "*She* thought he'd better wait."

"I'll go down to the city with you." A mere pellet

of consolation, this, when the situation called for super-abundance.

"Cousin Brenda and Aunt Ellie have gone to live in an apartment, and—and—" almost her voice broke pathetically again—"and Hannah!"

"Hannah!" With her free left hand Elizabeth gently stroked Louise's arm, frowning desperately not so much over the disturbing transpiration of a second Mrs. Maxon as over her own ineffectualness as a comforter in the crisis. She would have liked to companion Lou to her very home, to the very presence of her step-mother, but even to intimate her wish seemed not delicate, intrusive, boorish.

"Bet, will you come home with me?" The white face was turned to her, its eyes hurting her to the very depths of her own heart.

"Sure, I will!" The arm round Lou's shoulder still expressed a safe minimum of feeling. It would be a shame to break Lou down with an over-demonstration. "We'll get the four-something." She rose briskly. "We'll be in the city—up at your house easily at six."

They were. They were admitted, two timid aliens as they felt, by a Japanese servant—undoubtedly Mrs. Maxon's idea. The lady of the house and the man of the house would be in for dinner. The girls went up to Lou's room, speaking in low tones or in whispers as if someone were dead. They washed and dressed and waited. Louise sat, a listless, jaded figure, on the edge of the bed. Elizabeth tried one chair, then another, stood before the mirror to rearrange her hair, examined several photographs propped up on the dresser, wandered to the door, peeped out, and returned, sat sideways on the little dressing-table chair, and beat a tattoo with her French heels.

"Lots of girls have step-mothers—nice ones," she proffered out of a protracted silence.

"That's just it. Nice ones." Lou still sat, motionless and with sagging shoulders, on the bed-side.

"There's Nell," pursued Elizabeth, warming up to her subject and pretending optimism even to herself. "She calls hers 'Molly-O.' They're regular chums."

Lou uttered a word belonging to no language, ending on a strong guttural note and beyond doubt conveying the very sum total of all abhorrences.

"They trot around the city together, shopping," the consoler went on.

"Picture it!" Lou raised steady meaningful eyelids. "Did you ever see Laura Cartright?"

The unpractical, unperceptive character of any human being who would entertain even a glimmering hope for a pictorial representation of Louise and her stepmother on a comradely shopping jaunt struck Elizabeth with hundred-fold force when she met the tall, lithe lady at dinner. Louise had gone falteringly to her father and had buried her face against his shirt-front, and he had embarrassedly petted her for a moment or two, saying in his old way, "There, there, daughter!" while Elizabeth had pressed the shapely limp hand of the second Mrs. Maxon. A scarcely veiled expression of surprise in the hard dark brown eyes and an infinitesimal lifting of the black brows had indicated the lady's awareness of the guest's uninvited state. But for one's friend, brave loyalties must armor one's sensitiveness. The guest, moreover, took heart of grace at the host's cordial handshake and equally cordial inquiry regarding the health and happiness of Jack, and imposed upon herself, during the ordeal of dinner, the obligation of a volubility unsurpassed by her before or afterwards in her earthly existence. She sat across the table from Louise who, having submitted to a kiss from her stepmother, was withdrawn into the caverns of silence.

"You look a little tired," observed Mrs. Maxon.

Louise found no word for a reply.

"She's catching cold, I think. She was sneezing on the way in. The train was hot. It was awfully hot, and then getting out it was—was cold."

Elizabeth ended flatly, but Mr. Maxon, with a magnificent apropos, came to her rescue, introducing and elaborating the topic of the Canadian climate and country, and dwelling in detail upon the trip through that part of it which he and his wife had investigated in the fortnight past. She in a low rolling voice added a running commentary, and Elizabeth exuberantly filled up the interstices of the travelogue with feverish "How wonderful!" 's and "How interesting!" 's.

In the library after dinner, Louise, on the arm of her father's chair, managed a few mechanical sentences and even attained to an approximately natural "Lovely!" in admiration of a quaint old gold brooch, a gift from her stepmother and selected by her on the Canadian trip.

Before they retired, Elizabeth bethought her to telephone home. And it was, "Hello, Mother darling! How *are* you? Are you sure? How is Father? Tell him I want to speak to him. Well, anyway I want to speak to him myself.—Hello, Father! How *are* you? Your rheumatism all right? Is everyone well? Oh, no! I'm not worrying. I just thought I'd like to hear your voice and Mother's."

Louise standing near listened unconsciously and lonesomely, catching the lonesome note, too, in Elizabeth's solicitous inquiries and in her observation at their conclusion.

"I'd better run over and see the folks tomorrow."

"And I'll go up to call on Aunt Ellie and Cousin Brenda. I'll stay with them tomorrow night."

And so it was arranged. At noon the next day they went their several ways, Louise having had exactly ten minutes alone with her father, during which priceless interval he had frequently cleared his throat in prepara-

tion for formal speech, but under pressure of emotion had limited himself to questions about her health, her studies, her amusements at college; while she, though uttering mentally declarations of her affection for him not altogether unmingled with reproaches, had replied, with fixed smiling lips, to his interrogatories, and volunteered a prospectus of the activities of her class between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Sunday night she and Elizabeth were train companions on their journey back to Convent. In Elizabeth's room later, Louise with others listened for a while to an irresistibly entertaining recital by Jack's sister of his advantures as an able-bodied seaman, but at its conclusion broke away from the steadily increasing crowd of foregatherers, and betook herself quietly to bed. Alone at last she was keenly conscious of an aching head, and of dry lips and a raw throat. She went to sleep, though uncomfortably enough, and dreamed that she was being driven against her will to take a trip to Canada. She called out loudly that she had missed the train and that it was *their* fault anyway. She awoke suddenly in the grayness of morning, with streaming eyes. She was not weeping—she knew that. This was something else. It was a cold undoubtedly. The furniture of her room moved nauseatingly before her. Her head was heavy—very heavy, indeed. Yes, undoubtedly, she was ill.

Sister Grace, the nurse, came after breakfast and ordered her over to the infirmary in the main building.

"I have a nice sunny room for you."

She pinned a sign, "Visitors prohibited," on the door of the nice sunny room when Louise was safe in bed there, and departed, saying, "The doctor will be here in a little while."

The room was bare of cheering ornament, and it was a garish sunlight that brazened its way through the window panes and appropriated with its irritating glitter the whole side of one wall. Louise pressed her hands to

her stinging eyes, and soon slow tears came trickling through her fingers. No, this time it was not the cold. She struggled bravely, almost in a panic, against her rising emotion. But her stoic resolve had failed her utterly. She buried her face in her pillow, and cried, and cried, and cried.

Three days passed—three days of looking out dully at a sky whose panorama of blue—swept with masses of white cloud or sometimes with a swift scud of gray—for her, changed unavailingly to silvered tints of early morning and at evening to radiant glories of crimson and purple and gold. Beauty had become to her as if it were not. Life consisted of novices walking shyly in at eight, at twelve, and at six with her tray, and of the tall, stout, kindly-countenanced doctor at two each afternoon, and of Sister Grace, imperturbable and uninformative, thermometer in one hand, in the other the inevitable glass of milk or of hot lemonade topped with a "butter chip," *its* round surface showing invariably a white tablet and a brown. Louise liked the novices. Toward the end of the third day, she was feeling sufficiently improved to differentiate them, and to inquire from the one who brought her supper tray,

"What's the little one's name—the one who brought my breakfast?"

"Oh, that's Sister Theophane."

"Isn't that a strange name?"

"It's the name of a young French boy who became a priest—a foreign missionary. He was martyred in China." The novice was slowly backing toward the door. "Can I do anything for you?"

"No thank you, but—"

"You're welcome." The novice smiled cordially and was gone.

It was borne in upon Louise, distressingly, that she was a "secular." However, there was a thrill in the detail about the French boy. To be a martyr! What a

relief thus suddenly and triumphantly to end life's misery! She would love to be a martyr! Some of these novices—Sister Theophane, perhaps—would go to China some day and die nobly there. How sweet and guileless the novices were! *They* did not know anything about the wretchedness and suffering of the world. It was interesting, too, that some of them were graduates of the college. Of course! Why not? Why *shouldn't* she be a sister? She might just as well be a sister as not. Who would care? She might just as well bury herself in a community and carry trays and teach and wait for death. There was nothing worth living for anyway!

She *would* be a sister! The thought was restful like smooth waters. An hour of tranquil musing over it was hers between seven and eight P.M.—and hour, too, of gazing out appreciatively at the mystic loveliness of night-fall. She sang dreamily to herself in low, lingering tones,

> "Sunset and evening star
> And one clear call for me——"

And of that "beauteous evening," the holy time

> "quiet as a nun
> Breathless with adoration,"

brought her something like respite from grief, something like calm.

Thursday was signalized by the removal of the sign prohibiting visitors—with the result that Louise almost wished it back again. Friday afternoon came, however, with welcome relief from ill-advised though well-intentioned friends who sat on your feet at the foot of the bed, or were eager to shake up your pillows, or rub your head, or fetch you a glass of water, or do a thousand things which you heartily wished left undone.

"You may get up if you like," said Sister Grace standing for a moment in the open doorway. "You can sit there by the window and see the girls going away."

A happy suggestion! Nevertheless the patient followed it, and fully dressed, even to her fur coat, Elizabeth found her mournfully surveying, from the vantage post indicated by Sister Grace, the carefree caravan of week-enders trotting over, under bobbing umbrellas, in a cold sleety rain-storm to the train.

"Pollywog, I'm awfully sorry, but Mother wants me home. I hate to refuse her, because she's sort of hurt, you know, when I don't go. She says I prefer college to home. Imagine it! But I can't persuade her. And Father, too. They're so dear!"

A brave smile was the response, and a shaky hand extended in token of understanding. Elizabeth took the hand in both of hers.

"Shall I call up your father, and tell him you're ill?"

Louise shook her head and with proud quivering lips signified her opposition to the idea.

"Sister Grace told me to write yesterday, and I said I would, but I didn't."

"Why didn't she write, herself?"

"I promised, and I told her one of the girls would mail it. But I couldn't. Maybe later. Aren't you going to miss your train?"

Elizabeth lugubriously departed, asseverating in the same monotonous though sincere phrase her wish that she "didn't have to go."

She must have been far, far down the corridor when Louise, alone once more, dropped her head on her arms in deadly peril of an onslaught of tempestuous feeling, not quite sure that she wished to be a sister—not quite! It would be nice now, for illustration of an opposing argument, to be going home. . . . Would it? Would it really be nice to be going home? Oh, no! Oh, no! Oh, no! Small wonder, indeed, was it that Aunt Ellie and Cousin Brenda had fled! And Cousin Brenda's flight proved as nothing else could that the second Mrs. Maxon was a tartar!

"Yes, a tartar!" The tartar's stepdaughter raised her head and blinked fiercely out at the treetops bending in tragic helplessness under the pitiless sleet and the cruel, tearing wind. "Nell's Molly-O may be all that Bet says, but—"

A knock of official quality broke in upon her dismal cogitations. Sister Angela entered.

"How are you to-day, Louise?"

"All right, thank you, Sister."

"I was going to send for your father. Should you like me to?"

Now Sister Angela stood to college students as a symbol of authority, and, albeit Louise was a law-abiding soul, she shared the difficulty of the human race in clasping to its bosom that potent force which saves the world from anarchy and ruin. Duty was undoubtedly duty, but was as undoubtedly no subject for a poet's high enthusiasm. No one should ever have written an ode to duty. No one could feel friendly and chummy toward duty. No one could feel friendly and chummy toward Sister Angela. And why had she mentioned a person's father? Here she was—authority and inconsiderateness combined! Louise's breathing became heavy. She closed her lips tight, and eyes downcast, began sedulously and unnecessarily to smooth out the fur on her coat sleeve.

"Well, what do you think about it? Shall I send for him?"

A sickening premonition took possession of Louise that in one more second she would unrestrainedly burst out crying in the very presence of that tall, capable representative of law and order.

"I don't know," she half whispered. "I don't care! Sister, will you please go? Will you please—please leave me alone?"

Sister went. And Louise, alone as she had requested and head down on her arms once more, plunged straightway into the foregone paroxysm of weeping.

In the evening Sister Angela returned, admirably deporting herself as if the unwonted in the form of a rude dismissal had not been her experience earlier in the day.

"Sister Grace says you may come over to Santa Rita to-morrow," she remarked at leaving. "And if the weather is clear, you may go out, and then I am sure that you will really be—as you say—'all right.'"

The rain ceased that night. In the morning the sun broke on a faerie campus of crystal—crystal trees, every little twig a-sparkle, crystal grass, every blade glistening and erect, crystal shining walks and paths, and deep fringes of crystal depending from the ice-encased electric wires between the main building and Santa Rita Hall. The convalescent, glancing up on her way over, took heart for a moment and even smiled a bit happily at four little faerie snowbirds, white with coal black wings, that rose quickly at her coming and flew to the branches of a glittering maple tree.

At noon, lunching alone from a tray in her room, she watched pensively the gleaming ice-showers at every blast of the November wind, falling from buildings, trees, and wires. Her solitary meal accomplished, she turned to domestic duties. Forlornly, though with firm mind, she drove herself to the arrangement of the disorderly array of variegated volumes on her bookshelves. She was interrupted in her painful task—truly depressing to any book-lover, since books are undeniably intended to be lying round in lovely disorder where one may pick them up at will and read them at any time—she was interrupted by her call bell. She hoped Fritzie was not inviting her down to the reception room to see Billy. It was too early for Billy, she concluded, as she dragged her steps along the corridor, and thank goodness, it would not be the doctor. It was not Billy. It was not the doctor. She ran all the way down the stairs below the turn at the landing and threw herself into his big strong loving arms.

"Father! Father!"

"You have been ill! The sister sent for me." He kissed her once, twice, three times.

And looking up at him through shining eyes, their lashes wet, and laughing because she could not find her voice for speech, she drew him into the reception room, and pulled over for him to the brightest corner near a window, a great arm-chair. They sat there for a long time, she perched beside him on the arm of the chair, and they talked, oh, so comfortably, of old days and of Lou's mother, and of Lou's unwillingness to come to Saint Elizabeth's, and of that night when Jack Stedman had mentioned that his sister was to come.

"He called in to see me at the office," said Mr. Maxon, resting his gaze on the wall.

"Will you ever take him back?" The question was, perhaps, intrusive.

"He didn't come for that. Just a friendly visit. Nice boy. I wish I *could* get him back."

"Can't you?"

Her father shook his head, and she understood that Laura was the obstacle—or Laura's nephew.

"I love Bet!" They must talk of happy things to-day.

"And you really like it here?"

"Sometimes I love it! Though, of course," she added with a little chuckle of appreciation at her inconsistency, "I criticize it like mad, and find fault with lots of things I'm not crazy about. We all do."

They discussed the college for a short while, and her father made promise—in fact, he suggested—that after graduation she should go to Europe—to England, to France, to Italy. . . .

"But what if I should become a sister? I was—was considering it."

"Not seriously, of course."

"Well, but what if I should?"

"If it would make you happy—" He coughed with

unnecessary effort—"I am willing. I—I should not really mind. No, I should not. There's Mr. Crawford, district attorney in Craveston, has a daughter a nun out West, and when he speaks of her, he holds his head so high, you'd imagine he was talking about—about the Queen of—of—"

"Say England. It always sounds well," laughed Lou. She was in super-excellent spirits. "But, of course, I'd have to become a Catholic first. Would you mind *that?*"

The demonstrative was presageful, to Mr. Maxon's ears, of all the petty and significant persecution destined to beset the major number of those human beings born in or converted to the Faith. He hesitated, but only for a moment or two.

"It was your mother's religion. If you like—I don't mind. It would make a difference in some ways—ahem! —in the world, you understand."

"But how could it if I were in the convent?"

"Yes! Yes! I forgot. Well, do whatever will make you happy. I want you to be happy." He was pathetically earnest. "But, dear, it won't be for some time—will it?" He gazed wistfully up at her. "You won't leave me yet?"

"Not for ages!" She threw her arms round him, and resting her cheek against his hair, whispered, "You've been such a good, good father to me!" She must never, never leave him—though he had left her. Yes, he had left her!

"There, now! There, now!" He stroked her hand gently. "There, now! Father's little girl!" Then after an embarrassing second—"You'll get your degree here. Some people—" She fancied he meant Mrs. Maxon the Second—"Some people are opposed to it—suggest other plans. But I am quite determined—quite determined." Presumably he had been arguing the point. "It is my wish that you complete your college work here. You want to?" He drew her forward and forced her to look

at him. His eyes were troubled, and undoubtedly he seemed older than she had been accustomed to consider him. Certainly his hair was grayer than it had been in the summer, and his expression was worn and strained.

"Of course! Why not?" She wished her college years would hurry by so that she could be home with him to take care of him. As for the present—at least, it must not be emotional. Of emotion she had had sufficient in the past week. "Let's go out," she said.

"It won't be too cold for you?" He rose with a resolve to be gay. "Why didn't we think of it before?"

She had to go up to her room for her coat. As she left him at the foot of the staircase, she heard him beginning to hum to himself, quite flatly and with a pitiable attempt at high spirits, the chorus of "Auld Lang Syne." But she was unreservedly happy. She ran all the way along the corridor to her room, bundled herself into her coat, bestowed a joyous laughing glance upon her radiant face in the mirror, and almost danced her whole way back to him. Arm in arm, they went out into the shining world of faerie.

"It looks as if it had rained ice!" There was a bonny lilt in her voice, and her cheeks tingled with the pure air. "You know, Father—" she smiled shyly up at him and was thrilled to see a happy smile upon his lips—"you know, when the campus is like this—all diamondy ice on the bushes and trees, and broken up all over the ground —See?—and brown patches of earth showing through in some places—See, Father?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"Well, when it's like this, everyone says, 'My, isn't it just like fairy-land!' " She chuckled as if at an excellent joke. "I don't. You know, it's curious, but even if I think it's like fairy-land, I can't say it. The other girls do. They say, 'Isn't it gorgeous!' and 'Isn't it wonderful!' But I can't. Why?"

"I'm not quite sure, dear." They were striding along

at a rapid pace, he assisting her with a firm clasping of her arm at the elbow. "I'm not quite sure. You never talked much. Then Brenda and Ellie talked a good deal. A good deal," he repeated reflectively. "You didn't have a chance. Too many grown-ups." His hand twitched slightly against her arm. "Does it make you unhappy?"

"Oh, no!" She was alert to shield him from painful self-accusations. "People don't notice. Besides I'm getting over it. Bet and I talk a whole lot. And just see how much I've talked this afternoon." She hesitated; then summoning all her powers of articulation, she added, "I'm so awfully glad you're here!" And quickly, to prevent further emotional display, cried, "Look at the valley!" They had reached the walk that runs along the plateau near Santa Maria Hall. Far, far below them lay the snow-covered fields and meadows, a pastel in white and gray, with the blue slope of the hills rising against the sky. "Isn't it wonderful!"

"Amazing!" He stood in silent admiration of the picture, in the diffused light of the afternoon sun extraordinarily restful to his weary eyes. "Louise, you must *not* leave this place."

"Of course not. We've settled that." She pondered his earnestness of tone, nevertheless, in an attempt to decide whether the *not* implied a *never,* whether "this place" meant specifically the college or the convent; and walking along quietly beside him, she sent her fancy to play with that future of hers as a sister. Only it would be pleasant to have her father near—boarding, perhaps, at the farmhouse on the back road where all the white chickens pecked about in the clean earth in the spring, and where she could see him often. In the summer he would come over to the convent, and they would go up to the plateau and look at the valley when it was rich and green. In the world there would be no one so happy as they! Temporarily the second Mrs. Maxon was, for her step-daughter at least, non-existent.

Her father left at five o'clock. Lou went over with him to the arch at the campus entrance, and there at the sound of the approaching train he kissed her goodby. She watched him go down the steps and along the walk —shoulders straight, head erect—to the outer gate. Then an overmastering impulse seized her, a wistful yearning to speak to him once more—just once more. She ran down the steps and after him, calling,

"Father! Father!"

He turned about quickly, and strode back to meet her. She threw her arms round his neck. She was unable to explain her whim. She could only whisper, with that tight thing in her throat suffocating her,

"I just wanted to say goodby again."

Very tenderly he kissed her, and, "Goodby, my own daughter. God bless you. God keep you," he said.

The train had pulled in. He was obliged to run for it. He boarded it—to her, a vague, dim figure through the mist that blurred her eyes.

After those hours with him, however, after that day, life re-assumed its morning radiance. An arduous and protracted struggle with Latin prose, an assignment for Monday, was sweetened by the thought that the work was for him. She would make a record, a high record, so that he would be proud of her. For him *Her Goal* progressed one whole impressive paragraph. To him she was determined her novel would be dedicated. To My Father. Or perhaps it should be

Affectionately Dedicated
To Her Father
by
The Author

The publisher would help her to a decision. But that would be a long time hence—two years, anyway, perhaps even three. In between, despite frustrating circumstances, there would be hours and hours of comradeship

with the one she loved best in all the world. Exultingly, Sunday night, she told Elizabeth all about the precious visit.

"It was quite as well then that I went home."

"I suppose so," Louise replied, knowing perfectly that Elizabeth would understand, "because, oh, Bet, we were so, *so* happy!"

It was Elizabeth who ran up the hill after her not many days later, the very day, indeed, before the Thanksgiving recess, and called her, and beckoned her to return.

"Sister Angela wants you." The words were formed by lips quite hesitating and alarmingly pale. "A long distance for you—from home, I think."

"From Father?"

"I—I think it was your step-mother." They were walking back together now, and Lou was all at once trembling with cold, though the warm sun was shining.

Sister Angela was waiting for them, standing in the upper foyer outside her office. She walked forward to meet them, and with a palpable effort at concealing the burden of her message, pushed back from Lou's forehead, white and strained, a lock of hair not at all out of order.

"You have to go home, dear." The gentleness of tone was heavy with omen. "Mrs. Maxon—your stepmother, has just telephoned to say that your father—is—is—"

"Ill?" Louise raised searching eyes to Sister Angela's countenance for the honest answer. Sister hesitated. "Dead?" She could hardly draw the word up to her lips. It seemed to be pulled back by the little jerking spasms in her throat. But she said the word, and heard the reply, and heard it again, and again, and again, repeating itself, echoing itself, and confusing itself with speeches by other people about someone's hat and a train and—and she felt very odd and dizzy, and thought that perhaps she ought to cry.

Elizabeth went home with her, and Cousin Brenda and

Aunt Ellie were there to receive her and to enfold her in their loving arms. Mrs. Maxon was resting, exhausted after a long vigil of two days and two nights. It had all been extremely sudden, Cousin Brenda explained. Pneumonia. No one had realized the seriousness of his condition until it was too late. He had called for Louise at the end.

"Are you sure? Are you sure?" she sobbed.

"I'm sure—absolutely," said Cousin Brenda. "He repeated several times, 'My little daughter—my little daughter.'"

He lay near the window in the library. Looking hard at him, Louise experienced a curious sense of unacquaintance with him. This silent, calm-faced man resembled her father, but was not really he.

"You're not lying there! You're not!" When no one was by to observe her, she cried unrestrainedly. Often she whispered to herself, bending over him, "I'm so glad! I'm so glad!" It was her consolation now that she had uttered not even a syllable of reproach to him because of her stepmother.

During the latter's retirement, the daughter of the house, under the imperative demands of courtesy, forced herself into a semblance of calm, receiving callers with Cousin Brenda and Aunt Ellie, and after a while easily imitating their "We are very grateful," or "It's so good of you," in response to embarrassed or mechanical expressions of sympathy. Sister Angela and Sister Madeline came down from college and spent an hour with her.

"Pray for him. Won't you, Sisters?" she said on their going—for Cousin Brenda was not around to hear the heresy—and was immensely heartened by Sister Angela's, "We shall, indeed," and by the assenting expression in Sister Madeline's all-compassionate eyes.

Her friends from college dropped in, in little awe-stricken groups, with no offering of solace at their arrival in most cases but a hand-clasp and a "Hello, Lou,"

and a smiling "Goodby, Lou," at their relieved departure. Elizabeth remained with her, and sat with her in the dimly lighted room on the last night, until close to ten o'clock. Then Jack came. She was glad of that. Her father would have been glad. She stood with Jack gazing down at the dead face, and for a second was startled by the fancy that the eyelids had moved as if about to open.

"His eyes *didn't* move. Did they, Jack?" She looked up at him, a nervous half-smile on her lips. "I know they didn't. But tell me."

"Of course not." Jack gazed anxiously at her in the dim light. "You're tired. You're worn out. Why can't you go rest? I'll stay here. Come, Bet. Make Lou go. You go with her."

Here Cousin Brenda opportunely entered the room, and keeping well in hand her constitutional antipathy to an eligible young Roman Catholic, joined her injunction to his pleading until Louise was forced to yield to both, and went off upstairs with Elizabeth.

Fully dressed, they threw themselves on Lou's bed, and talked intermittently for three quarters of an hour or more when Elizabeth drowsed away into the silence of sleep. Lou herself dozed a little, but woke several times at slight sounds in the house. At length she heard the great clock in the hallway downstairs striking midnight. She sat up suddenly, the thought of the morrow overpowering her. "I will not! I will not bury him in the ground!" She began to sob, but remembered Elizabeth who was still asleep. She must not be disturbed. Louise slipped quietly from the bed, and tip-toed out of the room. Jack would be gone, and if no one else were in the library, she would have her father alone, all to herself for a little last while. The stairway was quite dark; she had to feel her way down carefully by the balustrade. There was no light in the hall. She stepped noiselessly over to the portières drawn close together across the

library door, and still noiselessly, opened then a little space and peeped into the room. It was blackness all, except over where her father lay. At his head a single tall candle burned, catching the gleam of the white satin lining of the coffin, resting on the gray of her dead father's hair, and touching into prominence, with its faint though definite glimmer, the blond manly head of a figure kneeling beside him there. She gazed breathlessly for the instant of a breath only, then softly closed the portières, and fled upstairs. Jack would not want her to know. Men were like that, she intuitively divined. They would prefer not to be thought pious. At the top of the stairway she paused and leaned over the balustrade. Someone had switched on the light in the hallway. It was Aunt Ellie. She came from the dining-room as Jack stepped out between the library portières.

"Drink this before you go." She handed him a cup of coffee.

"I thought I heard you at the door." He drank the coffee, and picked up his hat and coat from a chair. "I'll be back early in the morning."

"You are very kind, Mr. Stedman." Aunt Ellie was shaking hands with him.

He went out into the night, and Aunt Ellie, having switched off the light in the hall, returned to the dining-room.

Louise stole down the stairway again rather more rapidly than before, and this time entered the library without preliminaries, and hastened over to the window where her father lay. Jack had been praying for him! Yes, truly, with her own eyes she had seen Jack kneeling there! Gently, affectionately, she passed her finger-tips across the still forehead, then with a step toward the window, pulled back the draperies, drew up the shade, and peered out into the cold street. In the flickering of an arc lamp a few doors up from her home, she discerned a forlorn pedestrian or two striding hurriedly

along. A taxi-cab whirred by with irreverent speed. But for the most part, the dark city block was lifeless, deserted, a dull blank.

"If I *had* a brother," she mused desolately, "it wouldn't all be quite so dreadful! I mean a brother like Jack."

CHAPTER VII

VOCATION

BEFORE Christmas there was for Louise a week and a half of dazed existence at college, followed by a fortnight with Cousin Brenda and Ellie in their unhomelike apartment uptown in New York. Mrs. Maxon had closed the old house and had decamped to Canada for a rest. Lou thought of her sometimes with bitterness, sometimes with a species of sympathy, but rarely for a protracted period unless provoked to wrath against her by Cousin Brenda's indictments of her which were, in the nature of things, none too mild, and ordinarily were unforeseen. With the prompt initiation of that weird and unintelligible process known as "settling the estate," Louise found her allowance of money restricted, but to this deprivation she was flatly indifferent, persuaded that for the brief span of life which remained to her, moderate resources, even meager resources would be sufficient. She could not live long. There was nothing to live for. Possibly after the settlement of the estate she would be obliged to earn her own livelihood. This contingency obtruded itself from the chaos of her thoughts upon the future, not vividly nor in a fashion to stimulate any emotion, but with just enough prominence to indicate that passing marks in the mid-year examinations of one's sophomore year constituted an essential factor in the sum-total of credits required for a degree. And a degree might not be altogether useless as a ticket of admission to certain positions in which one would work for one's bread and butter.

After the mid-year examinations—and she passed them, though with inferior grades and caring not a whit about the circumstances—Nell, of all people, came to her with a rebuke for her inefficiency.

"*C* in history!" The censor tried, with something almost like success, to appear disgusted. "See here, young lady, you'd better make a good record if you're going to teach."

"I might write." The alternative was mentioned in level, uninterested tones.

"And starve! No money in it in the beginning unless you're a genius or a hardened criminal willing to sell your soul. And even the geniuses lose out most of the time on the financial side."

"I don't think I'm a genius."

"Neither do I," returned Nell with deliberate cruelty, the flicker of a satisfied smile passing over her face at the note of pique in Lou's voice and the momentary flash of resentment in her eyes. "All the more reason why you ought to stop mooning around this way and get to work."

"You're the most unkind person I know!"

"P'raps I am. But do you see any advantage in playing Mrs. Gummidge for the rest of your life?"

"I—I think you're awful, Nell Rawdon! I—I wish you'd get out of my room right away!" Lou's face was pallid, and she was trembling with anger.

Nell left her, and went eagerly, chuckling to herself, down the corridor to Elizabeth.

"I did it! She was furious!"

"Oh, Nell, you're wonderful! But how could you?"

"It had to be done," replied Nell, mopping her brow as if after some extremely fatiguing exertion. "It had to be! You can't let a perfectly good friend like Lou go doping along like that till she's melancholy. She'll be so mad at me now for days that she won't have time or energy for sadness."

After the first shock, Louise actually revived under

Nell's bluntness, incomparably more restorative than gentle speeches of pity would have been. Nell was practically disposed, too, regarding the details of Lou's mourning, and though upon bald reference to the subject the mourner at first winced, she gradually succumbed to battering counsels relative to organdie and crêpe, discussing them with as much composure as she had formerly discussed pale yellow hand-made sweaters and scarfs of coral tints, of jade, and of blue. Nell, moreover, designed and made an appropriately serious collar and cuff set for her, and inveigled her into making one for herself. If the pupil, occasionally losing interest, sat brooding alone in her room, she was without fail recalled to actuality by a visit from her peremptory and matter-of-fact instructor.

"What? Haven't you finished that collar? Let me see how you're getting along. The idea! You just hurry and finish that. I've got another pattern that you simply cannot do without."

Thereupon, the pupil would begin again feverishly stitching, a vague consciousness hers regarding the vital relationship between the preservation of sanity and the fabrication of fashionable neckwear.

"Nell," she asked one evening, "did you ever think of becoming a nun?"

"What ails *you?*" Nell lifted lazy eyes from an easy-going consideration of her dietetics note-book. Long since forgiven for the harshness of that first onslaught, she was accustomed to stroll in at study hour, like the proverbial, big and faithful Saint Bernard, to guard Louise against her habit of empty grieving.

"*Did* you?"

"I did *not.*"

"It must be nice—so quiet and peaceful."

"Did you finish your French for to-morrow?"

"Father said he wouldn't mind if I'd become one."

Nell was speechless.

"I haven't thought much about it since," Louise went on in a sad dreaminess of tone. "Sometimes it seems the only thing left."

"Golly!" murmured Nell. "Wouldn't the nuns on the faculty be complimented to hear you say that?" With ostentatious indifference to the topic of conversation, she turned several pages of her note-book apparently hunting for some dietary information of priceless importance.

"I wonder why they all entered!" Musingly Louise leaned forward, elbows on knees, her chin resting on her clasped hands.

"Probably because they wanted to." The unduly brilliant reply fell in accents of sufficient flatness to put a period to the discussion.

The idea, however, pursued Louise constantly, or rather she pursued the idea. Once or twice she caught herself weaving it into the plot of *Her Goal*—unquestionably an absurd misuse of time, since *Her Goal* would never be completed. Where would be the advantage? No one would be interested now in her success as a writer. It wearied her even to think of her novel. Much more restful, much more satisfying was it to contemplate, in rare hours of leisure, the gentle, peaceful, happy atmosphere of conventual life. She made trial of Elizabeth as a counselor on the subject. The counseler shied once or twice, but was at length caught at bay with a direct question.

"Did you ever imagine that you might be a nun?"

"Yeah. Most girls at convent schools do."

"Not Nell. She says so."

"Never?"

"Never. I wonder if Alicia ever did, or Amy."

"Yes, Amy told me she did—said it was a 'phase.'" Elizabeth laughed at some hidden element of humor in Amy's characterization of her experience.

"If you wanted to become a nun, what would you do?"

The dark blue eyes fixed themselves earnestly upon the evading eyes of hazel brown.

Over the eyes of brown went, swiftly, curtaining eyelids. The whole situation was ridiculous, of course, but Louise ought not to be hurt.

"I'd talk about it to someone who knows—perhaps one of the sisters."

"Anyone special?"

"I'd introduce it casually when I was talking about something else—say if I was having a conference about work—"

"Sister Margaret might do."

"But, Louie, you know you only see the sisters here—in a special setting, so to speak. You ought to see them working in other places—in hospitals and asylums, for instance—though it might depress you."

"Nothing could depress me. I'm too far down."

"Then why don't you do something for someone else?"

"Who, for example?"

"Well, me."

"What?"

"You know you told me once when we were freshmen that you were writing a novel about a girl who wanted to be an actress, and I know that you've been writing it, and I've always wanted to get a look at it. I'm dying to see it!"

Something stirred round Louise's heart, and she breathed as if fresh cool air were blowing about her.

"Really, Bet?"

"Yes. I've been sort of hurt sometimes because you haven't let me see it."

"Oh, I couldn't let you see it till it's finished," said Louise blushing at the very notion. "It wouldn't be the same—I mean, there's a lot about it that I hardly understand myself, and to let anyone else see it—"

"Then why don't you hurry and finish it?" urged

Elizabeth. "I think it's great! It's a college story—isn't it?"

Louise smiled and shook her head downward, "About our crowd."

"Great! Wonderful! Please, hurry and finish it. And, Louie—" Elizabeth leaned forward, her face radiating inspiration—"Louie, why not dedicate it to the crowd—to all of us?"

"Would they like it?"

"They'd be crazy about it!"

"Maybe I shall. They're awfully nice to me."

Before resuming work on her novel, however, she must clarify her ideas on the subject of religious vocation. Accordingly, after class period one day, she ventured to request an interview with Sister Margaret. The instructor appointed two days later at three-thirty.

"Come in after my junior section leaves."

Anticipation of the interview threw Louise into a state of trepidation, not that she foresaw the settlement of the pre-eminent question, but simply that she was going to talk with one of the sisters. Bet had a friendly, chummy way of talking to them, hesitating not to dash up the hill after any of them with, "May I carry your books, Sister?" or on a rainy day, "Please, let me carry your umbrella." Lou might feel a similar urge a hundred times a week, but a decision to follow it out was marked unvaryingly by failure. Her spiritual difficulties, therefore, as the time for the interview approached, lost some of their saliency, shrank temporarily into the background of her consciousness, the foreground being immensely taken up with the startling idea of Sister Margaret as an interviewee.

She was not formal, not distant, and smiled a welcome, with eyes as well as with lips, when Louise entered the room.

"You are disappointed about your midyear examination grade."

"Oh, no!" Louise had quite forgotten it.

"I wished that I might give you a higher mark; I knew that you were disturbed and unhappy. Are you feeling better?"

"I'm all right, thank you." She shifted her gaze from Sister's inquiring eyes to the books on the desk, then to the windows which offered her for security, through their rather dimmed panes, the sere leafage of tall thin trees screening the valley in the distance. "I'd like to speak about—about something—" she was pressing hot moist hands together—"I'd like to speak about—about—my English."

"It is satisfactory on the whole. Do you try any writing in addition to class assignments?"

Louise felt her temples moist now and her cheeks glowing.

"You do. What is it? Poetry?"

A quick negative shake of the head disclaimed the impeachment.

"Short-stories?" Sister was not unconversant with the several stages through which youthful authorship passed.

Another shake of the head, an hysterical giggle, and a half-whispered, "No."

"I couldn't imagine your writing essays. You do very well, but your aptitude lies in other directions." Then a light appeared to dawn upon the interlocutor. "Oh, I know. It's another play. *Lady Madeline* was very good."

"The dialogue was flat." A lead on dramatic technique, Lou hoped, would divert the conference from its present embarrassing channels.

"Not altogether. But *are* you writing another play?"

"No, Sister."

"Then what?"

"Don't ask me!" She turned away, slumped into a

lecture chair, crooked an elbow over the back of it, and against the elbow hid her burning face.

"It's a novel," murmured Sister with uncanny insight.

She was most encouraging about it, and not at all supercilious. "I tried to write one once—" she fingered a pile of junior "themes"—"before I became a sister."

For presentation of the supreme problem here surely was opportunity if opportunity ever had been anywhere! Louise reached out for it—but, confessedly, with a feeble, timid reaching, because, if the truth must be told, *Her Goal* at the moment was clutching pitiably at her heart-strings and crying out against being left alone in the cold, cold world.

"Aren't sisters permitted to write?"

"Of course."

"If a person became a sister before she finished, say, a novel, could she finish it in the convent?"

"Why not?"

Louise scrambled about mentally for the answer—she was sure there was one—but it safely eluded her.

Sister continued, gathering together, meanwhile, her junior themes, "Keeping on writing anyway. The practice is profitable. If I can help you—"

"I bore you."

"Not at all. I'm interested."

"Really?"

"Truly."

The little adverb was tonic to Lou's drooping soul. She became more confidential with Sister about *Her Goal,* and quite naturally they drifted into a discussion of fictional technique.

"Which of all methods of character portraiture should you prefer?" Louise asked.

The question was not a poser, nor was it thus regarded by Sister Margaret.

"In your novel," she said smiling, "I'd prefer Louie Maxon's."

Louie Maxon's! How surprisingly warm and friendly her name in that form sounded on Sister's lips! Sister, rising, mentioned that she was going to the chapel.

"May I go down with you?" The formula was courageously spoken.

As they left Santa Maria Hall, turned the corner of the building, and followed the walk down the long slope, the drooping soul revived more and more, and the sad eyes were lifted in enjoyment of that ever present beauty at Convent of tree-top tracery against an infinite expanse of sky. At the chapel door Sister said a "Goodby," and ascended the steps. Had Lou been a Catholic, she knew, she would have been invited in for a "visit." There was an unsatisfactory something about this conclusion to the interview. Besides, she had failed to obtain from Sister definite counsel on the way that leads to the conventual life.

"Sister, please," she called desperately. "I wanted to ask you one thing." Sister Margaret turned to listen. "In my novel there's a girl who thinks she's going to be a nun. I want to make it seem real. What should I have her do?"

"Why, first of all," said Sister, thoughtfully regarding the two stone deer couchant on either side of the walk across the roadway, "first of all, she'd better pray for light. Then—why—I'll tell you the rest some other time. But you must ask me, you know," she added, a smile twitching at her lips. "Do you mind waiting?"

Louise said she did not mind, and so Sister left her and went into the chapel. Lou stood there for perhaps five minutes at the foot of the chapel steps. The sky was blue. The air was invigorating. Sister Margaret was interested—had called her "Louie." How nice! There were various methods of character portraiture, but Sister had advised her to avoid imitation. *Her Goal* must be written, and re-written, and written again. That she knew. And it *would* be a jolly idea to dedicate it

to the "crowd"! Bet was an old darling, anyway! Somewhere off among the trees a woodpecker was diligently tapping, tapping. . . . "I wish I'd see a robin!" Even in February it is natural to fancy the nearness of spring. She caught the aggressive cries of blue-jays in the woods. "They're the noisy heralds," she laughed. "Soon March, April, and May, and orioles, and the girls singing out on the campus in the evening, and . . ." A train passed by far out on the edge of the campus, carrying people to the city. She must go in some day to see Cousin Brenda and Aunt Ellie. Poor dears! She had been little consolation to them in their grief. As for religious vocation, perhaps if she had asked Sister directly about it, the advice would have been precisely the same—to pray for light. That she would do. There might be an obligation. She drew a handkerchief from a coat-pocket—a neat little black-bordered handkerchief which she carefully unfolded. The black border was a perennial reminder of her father—if she ever, ever forgot. With the handkerchief serving as the canonically required head-covering, she mounted the chapel steps. Invited or not, she would make a "visit"—to pray for light.

She entered, and knelt in the last pew. Up in the very first pew Sister Margaret was at her devotions. A novice was going about the stations. Across the aisle from Louise, an old sister sat with head bent over a big shabby prayer-book. A procession of postulants, about sixteen of them, in black Priscilla garb, their faces rounded in their black net caps, came slowly in through the door at the front of the chapel near the sanctuary. Louise gazed quietly for a while at these several representatives of the religious state, then bethinking her of her own purpose, she lowered her head abruptly. The black bordered handkerchief fell off. She replaced it, a little sigh escaping her at the remembrance once more of her orphaned condition. She began to pray, and the prayer

that formed itself on her lips seemed eminently the best prayer under the circumstances.

"'Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom—'"

The hymn had been sung at her father's funeral that morning—that morning not very, very long ago, but seeming like a morning in another existence.

"'Lead Kindly Light—'"

They had taken him away then. They had taken him away! But the night before, she had had him all to herself! That first time when she had stolen down the stairs, she had peeped in through the portières. She had wanted him all to herself. She had held the portières open, and had seen the light shining on his hair, and had seen Jack kneeling there. . . . Jack was kneeling there, and the light was shining on his hair, too. . . . Jack was kneeling there. . . .

The chapel was warm and still. The soft afternoon sun streamed quietly, as in a dream, through the stained glass windows.

The seniors easily secured February fourteenth for their annual entertainment of themselves. Their color was red.

"Why shouldn't we have it?" said the senior president coldly to a contesting committee from the junior class.

The chairman of the committee could think of no other argument except that the sophomores, whose color was green, monopolized Saint Patrick's Day. At this silly statement, the senior president merely smiled a superior smile, and the juniors drifted out of her presence into the more congenial atmosphere of sympathizing friends.

Elizabeth, the imprint of her own dusty fingers on her brow and chin, forlorn loosened locks of hair falling over her face, pushed string, and scissors, and mucilage, and red card-board hearts away.

"Mallowmars!" She stood, with an attempt at vigor,

and, essaying a stride, achieved a wobbly sort of one toward the reception-room exit. This sophomore privilege of decorating the room for the senior Valentine party had exhausting entailments. Also the labor made one immeasurably hungry.

"Get me some milk chocolate," called a colleague on the committee. "Charge it."

"Bring me some peanuts, please," called another.

"A box of cheese tidbits for me," added a third.

A score of orders followed.

"Want anything, Louie?" Elizabeth looked back and up to the top of the ladder where Lou, a doleful figure in her black dress, sat holding the near end of an eighth of a mile of inch-width crimson crêpe paper.

"No, thanks."

"You ought to. Something wrong with you. I'll get you something anyway."

"No, don't. I don't want anything." This declaration she fully recognized as equivalent to a confession of default, for since her interview with Sister Margaret, in fact till yesterday, she had perceived in herself a steady advance toward a normal, even a cheerful state of mind. Retrogression had begun definitely last night. She had cried herself to sleep, childishly, she knew, but the extenuating circumstance was the morrow—this day, Saint Valentine's Day—which she was living now—without her father. This was the day on which he had always, as long as she could remember, sent her flowers. "Don't bring me anything—please!" she reiterated.

"You've got to have something," insisted Elizabeth departing, "and I'm going to get it." Her thoughts ran swiftly over the relatively nutritive qualities of dill pickles, saltines, mint-wafers, ginger ale, pretzels, and such other solaces for human woe as the mission shop encompassed in its dim interior downstairs.

She was gone for a stretch of ten minutes. She announced her return with,

"Louie, these are for you," and held out, with her left hand, a long green cardboard box, her right arm precariously encircling the various food orders of her co-workers on the committee.

Louise descended slowly, tremblingly, from her ladder, received the green box with hands grown quite cold, and attempted to break the string. Elizabeth, relieved of the provender, bent over to assist her.

"They're not from Alicia, of course. She sent you candy—didn't she?"

The question, for all the answer it got, might have been asked of the air. Between them they removed the cover, and pushed back the protecting tissue paper. It was true! Fresh as if with dew of morning, and more beautiful than her dreams of them! Roses! Red, red roses! Her roses for Saint Valentine's Day! Elizabeth picked up the little white envelope that lay among the green stems, and handed it to Louise. She opened it breathlessly.

"From—from Jack!" And the color flew to her face, and her eyes sparkled with sudden happiness.

"Jack?" His sister looked incredulous.

"I wanted them more than anything in the world to-day! You must have told him about Father!"

"About—about your father?"

"About his sending me flowers—red roses on Valentine's Day, you know."

"Oh, yes! But I don't remember telling Jackie. Maybe I did. I—I don't remember," mused Elizabeth reflectively. "But he's a dear old peach to send 'em anyway. Maybe I did," she added, but shook her head in doubt.

"I wanted them so badly!" Lou lifted them from the box, and pressed her face against their cool fragrant petals. "It was dear of him to remember. Father would have been so pleased! He would have been *so* pleased! He did love Jack!"

They lasted a long time. She gave them fresh water every morning, and watched in fear of the first indication of their fading. Their color glowing through her room often made her sing at work. Sometimes, laughing with them or at herself, she left them, for class, with "Goodby, darlings," and she thought of them frequently, with little stirrings of buoyancy, as she sat through a lecture or a recitation or an hour in the library. At the end of the day their radiant loveliness greeted her like a cheering welcome-home. On a certain afternoon she removed one from among its fellows and placed it against her black dress, observing the effect in her mirror. No, not against black! A red rose against black was tragic! Secretly she pressed the flower in her memory book—a concession to sentiment revealable not even to her heart's best sister, Elizabeth.

The letter of thanks to Jack had been, though the writer had not so intended, a formal little composition devoid even of the shadow of enthusiasm. Jack had responded with a lengthy epistle concerning mainly a business venture which for the moment looked golden to his hopeful eyes. Apparently he fancied that Lou's chief interest at college was mathematics, for he had, for her benefit, carefully added, multiplied, divided, subtracted, and problematicized to the extent of two whole pages.

"In a few years," he wrote, "with compound interest, it doubles itself—almost. Not quite, I'll admit. But granting that I can earn enough to add to it, it will eventually form the principal of a neat little income." And so forth.

"What does he mean by all that?" Lou, stalwartly holding her imagination in check, showed these arithmetical pages to Nell.

Nell, having gravely read them, handed them back with a laugh.

"You'd better grow up, Louie—though I like you young the way you are."

It was two or three weeks later, when the roses had gone to the paradise of flowers, that Elizabeth called on Lou at study hour to transmit the news about Anne's wedding.

"It's to be right after Easter. I had a letter from her. She's awfully sorry that you can't be one of the bridesmaids. Couldn't you really? We'll all wear gray. Anne says it will be all right."

"Go ahead, Louie," put in Nell. She had not yet relinquished her guardian rôle. The study hour still found her settled in Lou's room. "It's perfectly proper to be a bridesmaid even if you are in mourning. It will be almost six months *since*," she added ruthlessly.

Lou's answer was emphasized by a dropping of her face on her arms as they rested on the table, and a shaking of her head.

"I oughtn't. I don't want to."

"That's silly! You know your father would be pleased to death!" pursued Nell, blundering with charming insouciance into the unhappy phraseology.

"And Jack's not going away as he planned," hastily interposed Elizabeth.

The head stopped moving and lifted slowly.

"Even if it were all right, I'm afraid Cousin Brenda would object."

"She certainly would not. I wrote and asked her about it, and she says she approves. She wants you to be interested in things."

"Let me think about it," pleaded Lou.

"Yes, but decide soon. Won't you?" Elizabeth prepared to leave. "Anne ought to know, and time isn't standing still. Here's Lent coming, and before it two luncheons, a bridge, and a shower! And week-ends home for fittings! Awful! We'd better get a few hours of solid study in before the rush begins."

"She's getting old," remarked Nell when the door had closed. "Think of Bet talking about studying!"

"It's true, though," said Louise, avidly seizing her French "classic" and her dictionary. "We've got to study. But if I should decide to be bridesmaid, my dress needn't be a dark gray—need it, Nell?"

"M—m—no," murmured Nell, her eyes fastened on her notebook. "A sort of—sort of Franciscan tone."

Louise uncomfortably imagined a dig implicit for her in the reply, but a glance at Nell reassured her. That shining representative of the student division devoted to home economics was deeply engrossed in a closely written page of information concerning some such unromantic and unspiritual topic as the comparative powers of proteins and carbohydrates to keep aflame, in a given human being, that extraordinarily desirable essential to existence —the spark of life.

Between that night and the morning of the wedding, indeed, solid hours of study were discovered to be imperative. Louise's idealization of conventual life—calm, gentle, peaceful—was sorely challenged by the hard-hearted exactions of certain members of the faculty who had lived that life for many years. As "copy," as material for fiction, as story-book nuns, they were the reverse of satisfactory with their prosaic, business-like demand for "work" in return for "credits." The conviction slowly but positively settled upon her that these nuns could not credibly occupy the foreground of *Her Goal.* The public would not accept them as they were. They were not picturesque. They were not "atmospheric." She almost doubted their qualifications for background characters. Their speech was frequently crisp and matter-of-fact. They said such unpleasant things as, "You'd better see the dean about it," or "Have you asked the registrar?" or "How *could* you expect *B* when there is not one coherent paragraph in the paper?"

But in alleviation of scholastic trials, the wedding came at last, with Anne exquisite in white, and her four bridesmaids—one of them, Lou—perfect in delicate blossomy

tints of springtime. (Cousin Brenda had said, "Why insist upon gray? People don't.") At the breakfast Louise sat next to Jack, talking as cheerfully and as effervescently as the rest of the company. It was an achievement for which she could not account. When all was over, she could not recall one significant remark among those contributed by her to the conversation. But she had enjoyed herself. That was something. The emotions of the occasion had temporarily submerged all unhappy memories.

Moreover, six weeks later, notwithstanding the imminence of final examinations, she was cajoled into an excursion to the Stedmans' for a week-end.

"But you're not having a party—are you, Bet?"

Lou put the question surprisedly after possibly five minutes in the house which, to her, seemed overflowing with guests.

"No. Nobody extra here. Jim and his wife just dropped in for the evening. Margy has one of our little cousins up from the country. Bob and Anne are here for the week-end. They'll be going Sunday night. Some of Phil's friends are around, I think, but they don't count—and, of course, Jack. Do you know Jack's latest occupation?"

Lou did not know, but expressed an interest tempered with polite restraint.

"He's a chauffeur," declared Elizabeth. "Hired out last week to Mrs. Martin Fox Huntington—you remember, Aunt Minnie—treasurer or something of the New York chapter of our alumnae. Mother supposed I would be mortified, but I said let him go ahead. Who cares for Aunt Minnie or any old snob? He won't stand her long, and the experience will do him good."

"I think it must be wonderful to go round like that trying different things," observed Lou cordially. "Just imagine all the material he could gather for short stories and novels!"

"He'd better begin to gather something that looks a little more like money," returned Elizabeth. "But no one in the family can persuade him to settle his career."

At this point in their conversation, the subject of it called upstairs to them in stentorian voice a request that they hurry down. He wanted some music.

The boys of the household as well as their guests straggled into the living room at the first strains of some popular ditty, and to Elizabeth's unwearied accompaniment, sang, altogether too hilariously, a protracted repertoire from the exhaustless heap of sheet music and books piled high on the piano top. Between numbers they laughed and joked—also altogether too hilariously—until Mrs. Stedman gently reminded them of the neighbors, and with the aid of her daughters inveigled the assembly into several orderly bridge sets. At the end of a game, Jack invited Louise to go out on the verandah to cool off. There he confided to her how keenly he enjoyed the jest of his present "job."

"It's fun, but of course it isn't real business," he added. "However, I—I ought to become established in some definite work. I owe it to the family. Father's been fine all along—hasn't nagged at me. I hope I'll be able to pay him back some day. Now, with Bob and Jim it's different. They have to hustle. That's what a fellow needs—a motive, a high motive—to work for someone, you know, Louie—for someone—"

"Who'll run upstairs for my glasses?" Mrs. Stedman came smiling out to them. "I think I left them on the table in my room, or on the bureau, or somewhere up there—Jack, please."

"Certainly—Yes. I'll find 'em." Though not at the moment particularly attracted by the duty, he was apparently habituated to it, and, as Mrs. Stedman, an arm about Louise, drew her, in a kind, motherly-wise way into the house, he ran whistling up the stairs.

Sunday afternoon, Louise and Elizabeth made ready

to accompany Bob and Anne to New York to their little apartment which Lou had not yet seen.

"Shall I call a taxi, Bob?" Elizabeth had taken down the telephone receiver.

"No, indeed," interjected Anne before Bob had time to reply. "We'll go over by subway. I don't allow him to be so extravagant."

"Ah, just this time, Nan," pleaded Bob, while his sister practicing fortitude on her own account, was testing to the limit the endurance of a waiting and infuriated central.

"Now, Bob," returned Anne quite firmly, with admirable calm, meanwhile, drawing a white kid-glove over her alabaster hand, "you know perfectly well what we've agreed to do. Bet, dear, we're going by subway."

"Oh, all right," assented Elizabeth hastily, banging the receiver upon its hook. "Don't let me interfere—"

"Elizabeth darling," remonstrated her mother.

"You know right well they make you tired, too," whispered Elizabeth in a heated aside.

"Never mind." Her mother spoke soothingly, smiling in amusement at her son and daughter-in-law who had gone downstairs upbraiding each other in the most endearing terms. "They'll get over this."

"Bob won't," grumbled Elizabeth. "Our boys are ridiculous; they're so smitten when they do fall in love."

"Who's falling in love now?" asked Jack appearing at the door.

"You, for all we know," answered his sister. "Goodby. I shan't see you again. We're going back to college this evening right from Anne's."

"Gently, gently, maiden fair," returned Jack. "It is my intention, if you don't object, to escort you two young ladies to Bob's, and then to see you to the train for Convent."

"My! How solicitous!" exclaimed Elizabeth, simultaneously wheeling about to face her mother and with

significant gesture exhibiting an empty purse. "In the memory of man you never accompanied me to the train before."

Jack laughed at the reproach, and in a bungling attempt at nonchalance bent over to brush the rim of his hat with his coat-sleeve. But Louise, to her inexpressibly painful embarrassment, though apparently unobserved by the others, blushed to the very roots of her nice dark hair.

Anne's apartment was a treasure to behold—at least, thus thought Louise in the quite delightful tour which the party made from room to room. After the exploration, the three—Anne, Elizabeth, and Louise—sat in the kitchen, the dearest room of all, and gossiped about college while Bob and Jack talked and smoked in the living room.

"If I had to go through college again," declared Anne, "I should devote a great deal more time to domestic science. You have no idea how helpful that home-makers' course has been to me. And that sewing—"

"What about your art?" inquired her sister-in-law.

"I'm working at it just the same—that is, not regularly, but now and then. I mean I haven't quite gotten down to anything just definite, but when we buy our house—which is the reason for my opposition to the luxury of taxis—I'm going to have a studio, and Bob's going to have a den—or whatever you call it—to write in. He's going to write novels, and I'm going to illustrate them."

"Dream on," murmured Elizabeth.

"You're a dreamer yourself," retorted Anne, "and I'm sure your mother wouldn't approve at all of your dreams if she knew about them."

Here a vivid argument was undoubtedly thwarted by Bob who thrust his head in to announce the arrival of Fritzie and Billy Tucker.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Elizabeth. "Now we can all go back together."

After another ecstatic tour of the apartment for Fritzie's delectation, the assembled company sat down to a four o'clock tea in the little gem of a dining-room. Anne never wearied of recounting how she had planned the furnishings of her present abode, and of how she was planning and interior-decorating in imagination their future home where Bob was to write his masterpieces which she was to illustrate. "I wish I were an etcher," she sighed. Fritzie's blue eyes glowed with high interest during the rhapsody of her hostess. Billy and Bob laughed and joked a good deal over it, but Jack looked unusually thoughtful and concerned. When the party rose preparatory to leaving, he walked round, his hands clasping behind him, observing closely chairs, tables, pictures, rugs, and general effect, re-iterating profoundly to himself or to anyone who could spare an ear to listen,

"It's a nice little place, all the same—a nice little place."

When he assisted Lou to don her coat, he asked again, as if wishing her particular confirmation of his sentiment,

"Isn't it a nice little place, Lou?"

She rose sympathetically to a rapturous reply.

"It's perfect!"

"Do you study domestic science, Bet?" Bob patiently and awkwardly holding the graceful creation intended to adorn his sister's pretty head, put the question more for talk's sake than because of any appeal which the subject made to him.

"No—not yet," she answered. "I haven't time, or, I may say, inclination. I've had enough domestic science in the Stedman family. I lean toward dramatics. Do you think I'd have any chance in the movies?"

"Is there anything in them—I mean any opportunity?" Jack eagerly swung about, struck with a new idea. "I could get a position—"

"Merciful goodness!" exclaimed his sister, seizing her hat from Bob and pulling it on in her haste, back to front. "Hurry out into the fresh air before Jack becomes possessed of the movie demon, or else Aunt Minnie Fox Huntington will be losing her high class chauffeur!"

Bob, with some commission from Anne, who remained at home—and in the commission Louise suspected, for some reason, an element of myth—accompanied the party to the terminal in Hoboken, a circumstance permitting Jack to escort Lou.

"That's great—isn't it?" he breathed, in the dash from the tube to the train. "I mean about Bob writing a novel and Anne doing the pictures for it. Now, if a person could only write scenarios! Why don't you try to? You write a scenario, and get Bet and some of the other girls to act it, and if I get this position I have in mind, I'll take the pictures, and then—"

"But do you really think you ought to change your position again?" She felt that someone ought to advise him.

"You wouldn't want me to be a chauffeur all the rest of my life—would you?" There was certainly reproach in his tone.

"Oh, no!" she answered with more vehemence than courtesy or even charity required.

"Then I think I'll go down tomorrow and see about that position in the movie-machine company. And if you write the scenarios—" He did not complete the sentence, for they had reached the train steps.

Inside the coach, when the three girls were settled—Louise and Elizabeth together, Fritzie one place forward across the aisle—he remarked quite spontaneously, "I tell you what, Lou, that's a great little place of Bob's, and Anne knows how to keep it in fine trim. Well, we'll see what we can do about the movies." The train began to pull out. He was obliged to run, following Bob and Bill.

"Isn't he rash!" Elizabeth twisted round to gaze after him, but assured of his safe exit, deviated easily from her sisterly anxiety to rummage in her purse for her ticket. That found, she prepared for a chat. "Fritzie," she whispered.

There was no response from across the aisle. Fritzie, her eyes reposing dreamily on the hat-brim of the man in the seat ahead of her, was absorbed, as any casual observer might perceive, in the contemplation of the alleged silver lining of that cloud which hangs over the valley of life.

"Leave her alone," said Louise feeling an unaccountable yet extraordinary sympathy with Fritzie in her preoccupation.

"You have the right idea, I'll admit, Pollywog. But do we have to put up with these trances for two years? It will be two years from this commencement—one year from next commencement. We're all aging. In just twelve more days Nell walks off with her degree, and two years from this June, Fritzie, and you, and I. I tell you what, Poll-O, we might make Fritzie's wedding a commencement week event for our class—a real June wedding—*n'est-ce pas?*"

"I'd love that!" exclaimed Lou glowingly. "When *I* get married," she added smiling, but with that peculiarly wistful expression that came sometimes into her clear straight-gazing eyes, "when *I* get married, I hope it will be in June, too."

CHAPTER VIII

A CUBAN REEL

THE summer vacation following her sophomore year divided itself into ten quiet weeks with Cousin Brenda and Aunt Ellie in the Catskills amply squared by a subsequent fortnight of cheerful living with the Stedmans at their seaside bungalow. Louise not infrequently suffered certain twinges of remorse because of her happiness in those two weeks. That happiness, she was prone to fancy, involved a disloyalty to her father's memory. She imagined an imperfection in her grieving for him, though she did miss him, and often sadly longed for him—for a sight of his kindly face and for the feel of his big firm protecting arm round her. She could have cried out with loneliness when in the evening at someone's "There's Father!" the Stedman family *en masse* charged eagerly toward the door or down the verandah steps to welcome home the head of their affectionate household. Not that she was forgotten on such occasions. Oh, no! Elizabeth's arm was through hers, drawing her along with the group, or Jack was hanging back behind the others, ostensibly to light a cigarette, perhaps, but really to be with Louise until the first outburst of greeting was over, and he and she could step up with their special formula of salutation. And singularly enough it was not long before she realized that whereas Elizabeth's sympathetic attitude awoke an enervating sentiment of self-pity in her, Jack's more offhand though undoubtedly chivalrous ruse diverted her thoughts from herself to—well, in short, to him.

And so she hated the two weeks to be over. And she

hated to go back to college in September. But she went, naturally and reasonably, and fell into the routine, as the normal type of student does, before the expiration of many days of the new term. Besides, she was glad to see old friends—Fritzie, for example, who had garnered during the summer an additional crop of dignity, of gravity, of sweet seriousness.

"I don't *get* Fritzie," remarked Amy Pasker. "I should think she'd be more excited and larky, as it were. She doesn't even wear her ring when she's on the campus! Golly, if it were mine!"

But Lou thought if it were *hers*—not that one of course, but another—she would prefer to be like Fritzie about it.

"What is it in Fritzie that I admire, Bet? I don't know. Do you?"

"I think it's her reverence," returned Elizabeth thoughtfully. "There isn't a flippant note in her character, and yet she's not a solemn bore. I always feel crude beside her."

"You crude?" Louise indignantly rejected the notion. As if anyone related to Jack—and Elizabeth above all—could be crude! Preposterous!

Added to the interest of Fritzie's augmented charm, was the novelty of Alicia really grown very attractive over the summer, having acquired two inches or more for an encouragement to her still diminutive stature, and carrying herself with an air more assured than that which had characterized her freshman and sophomore years. She had thrilled through the vacation in a series of trips from New York to Los Angeles. She had met many Americans.

"Oh, I like them, these Americans!" she exclaimed, and continued with an arch glance of her brown Spanish eyes toward Louise, "Many of them too, liked me. I shall have much correspondence. I shall not be lonesome any more."

Louise, setting her lips in an expression that might be a smile or might not, made a mask of her face, irritably conscious, however, of blinking eyelids, for she had experienced, at Alicia's remarks, a sensation as of one dropping swiftly in an elevator from the forty-second floor to the basement, and had passed instant judgment upon herself as a redundancy in Alicia's life, a judgment which, while it afforded the judge a species of relief, curiously thereafter, though only for a moment or two at a time, gave a bit of pain to her pride.

Debby Morgan, more radiant and rosy-cheeked than ever, her black hair still a short mass just covering her ears, beckoned Louise one afternoon up the faculty stairway leading to the third floor of Santa Maria Hall.

"Fritzie's going to grind French into our brains for the test." The "test" was scheduled for a week and a half after the opening of college. "Bet's up there in the lecture room with her. Come on."

For reasons more social than intellectual Louise accepted the invitation and joined the student group which included Amy also.

"You all follow the text while I read," directed Fritzie, "and stop me if I make a mistake."

"Imagine it!" Elizabeth was seated on the lowest step of the thirty odd tiers rising to the windowed space at the back of the room.

"You couldn't make a mistake, Fritzie, if you tried," averred Debby settling herself with due regard for comfort in a place at the end of the second row above Elizabeth.

"We'll begin!" announced Fritzie with authority.

"But first," interposed Elizabeth waving high her closed "classic" with semophoric effect, "let me ask just one question."

"Very well—just one," weakly assented the preceptor.

"Couldn't we have a movie in here? See, there's a

screen rolled up over the black-board. Couldn't we—before Christmas sometime—and charge twenty-five cents admission?"

"Make it fifty," suggested Amy squinting into her little vanity mirror with a view to securing direct testimony to the fashionableness of her eyebrow lines.

"Fifty for a picture in here!" Debby leaned over, hospitably to offer an open roll of winter-green "life-savers" to Elizabeth. "No one'd come."

"Twenty-five cents is enough." Elizabeth, having accepted the refreshment, impolitely talked with a sample of it stuck in her cheek. "Jack has a position as agent with a big movie-machine company. He can get us historical and educational films free. The proceeds could go for some benefit—"

"The foreign missions!" Debby, all enthusiasm, vigorously thrust the life-saver package at Amy, who, nothing loath, transferred one of the dainties to her neat, thin-lipped mouth, and helped herself to another as a reserve supply.

"It would be wonderful!" Louise moved down from a chair in the first row to a place on the step beside Elizabeth. "And don't you remember, Bet—" she clasped her hands about her knees, and spoke in breathless eager tones—"Jack said once that if we'd write scenarios and act them, he'd take the pictures, and—"

"Write scenarios?" Debby, closing her classic, glanced dazedly from one to the other of the assembled company, quite galvanized by the stupendous idea.

"Is this French?" Fritzie, from her chair high in the third row, though not insensitive to the glamour of the subject now diverting her pupils from their bounden duty, put her obviously rhetorical query with an intonation of laudable sternness.

"My question has not yet been answered," persisted Elizabeth.

"Why not suggest it to the Mission Unit?" Louise knew well that her proposition had no root in zeal for souls.

"Twenty more minutes of my invaluable time is at your disposal," said Fritzie, her inhibited interest in the plans under debate acting all too palpably as a solvent upon the iciness of tone which it had been her intention to produce.

"Oh, all right," muttered Elizabeth. "I don't see what good French will be to me anyway!"

"Bah! Anyone can learn it any time they like," declared Amy.

"I suppose anyone can learn English too any time they like." Fritzie said it gently, though even if more stridently voiced it would not have hurt Amy.

"But English is more useful," asserted Debby in aggrieved accents. "Here, Louise, catch!" She flipped a winter-green from its oblong package down onto Lou's classic.

"When," asked Elizabeth with perverse righteousness, "are we going to begin translating?"

Fritzie's four pupils passed the French test—a matter subsidiary in importance, really, to the organization of "extra-curricular activities" in those first weeks of the new term. One considerable result of their success, however, was the winning over of Sister Celine, their French instructor, to an interest in their motion-picture enterprise, her name instantly securing for it an aura of dignity which otherwise it must have gone without. Moreover, it was she who obtained from the dean permission for the use of the lecture room and ratified their vote to advertise the picture as under the auspices of the French Club—*La Société Fénèlon.* The film, she had been charmed to learn, was to be strictly educational. Oh, strictly so! Jack wrote that he would bring a beauty —*The Siege of Orleans.* Since nothing more could be desired in the way of a title, the committee set the date

for the exhibition, the tenth of October. In anticipation, Louise and her friends voraciously reviewed French history, and Sister Celine lectured one full hour—most instructively, most fervently—on the famous event which was to be screened for the edification of those collegians who would pay the price of admission and endure suffocation in the lecture room on the designated afternoon of what might, in the natural order of things, turn out—unfortunately for box receipts—to be a perfect autumn day.

As a matter of fact, when the day came, it was chilly and mean. A slow, cold rain turned the landscape into a dreary mess of dull browns, and low reds, and sickly yellows, and depressing grays. Freshman mouths drooped at the corners conspicuously, and even seniors were observed wistfully making bee-lines for the mail-boxes.

"Isn't the weather the best ever?" Debby cried exultingly, and before entering Santa Maria Hall cast a backward and quite gratified glance at the soggy leaves of the oak trees on the plateau.

"I told you to make the admission price fifty instead of twenty-five!" Amy pushed moist locks away from her forehead. She had come up hatless and eager from the dormitory.

The two climbed the stairs and skillfully worked their way through the crowds in the corridors outside the lecture room. As members of the committee, they went in and closed the door behind them. Up on one of the high tiers in the center of the room, Jack, his head lowered over his machine, was endeavoring to make the necessary electrical attachments. Louise, nervous for the success of the entertainment, for *his* success, stood down near the three electric switches beside the door.

"All ready now if you'll turn on the power," Jack said at last, raising his head and smiling expectantly at her.

She pressed the proper button. The rest of the com-

mittee, in a tense group nearby—for these preparatory operations had been tryingly long—waited, staring up at Jack. He eyed his machine.

"Are you sure it's on, Lou?" He stood frowning at the little metal contraption.

Yes. She was sure. She asked him to look, and pointed to the switch. "See? One—two—three. It's the third button."

"Yes. It's on." He still frowned, and bending down, placed a hand on his machine. "I feel it." Then, an inscrutable expression wrinkling his brow, he asked, "Are you connected with the Morristown plant here, or have you your own dynamo?"

In chorus, prompt and proud, the committee answered, "We have our own dynamo."

"Then you haven't an alternating current; you have a direct, I suppose," he abstrusely observed.

They were unequal to a response. Elizabeth volunteered to find out by telephoning to the engine room. She brought back word to the anguished group awaiting her that the current was direct, also that an impatient crowd of collegians, chiefly freshmen and sophomores, were chafing and murmuring and getting horribly noisy out in the corridor because of the unreasonable delay.

"That's a pity! That's a pity!" Jack said the words with only a shadow of his cheery smile.

"You don't mean to say that it won't work?" His sister, voice high-pitched, clenched her hands in a paroxysm of apprehension.

"That's just what I do mean," he replied as one accepting an inevitable and none too welcome fate. "This machine runs only with an alternating current. We have others, of course, which run by both alternating and direct. But there are very few places where they have direct—"

"Oh, Jack, please try it," begged his sister. "I'll ask the electrician to come over—"

Louise imagined that she too had said "Please!" Actually she had not uttered a word, but was simply standing there, a statue of distress, staring up at Jack and feeling awfully, awfully sorry for him.

"No use," he said gloomily. "You can't have any motion pictures to-day."

Sister Celine, who had been sitting down at the demonstration table watching the preparations, her head held to one side, her small black eyes bright and alert, now came quickly forward with assuasive intent. No one was at fault. This she affirmed with Gallic decisiveness, pressing together the tips of her short tapering fingers. The error was unavoidable. Really, perhaps, it was all for the best. Things happened that way sometimes. She spoke cheerfully, rapidly, convincingly, her conclusion a suggestion that Elizabeth announce to the crowd outside the postponement of the entertainment.

Elizabeth, in reluctant compliance, was turning slowly toward the door when Alicia thrust her head in.

"Let Alicia do it. I never could face them. Come on in, Aleesh."

Alicia responded to the invitation, and was advised by a committee somewhat disorganized and vociferous concerning the lamentable *status quo*. Small wonder that she but vaguely grasped the essential facts. She was characteristically willing, however, to shoulder the unpleasant duty foisted upon her, and so went courageously forth to confront the disappointed audience. The committee inside, meanwhile, made arrangements with Jack for an exhibition on the following day.

"They were not so pleased," reported Alicia on her return, shrugging her shoulders, making a funny little grimace, and then displaying her even white teeth in a picture smile, exquisite and perfect. "But, of course, they are ladies. We are all very refine young ladies here, you know, Mr. Stedman—" with an upward and ironical glance of her dark eyes—"and they could not be so

unpolite as to call it a 'fake.' I told them, 'Girls, it is not a fake; it is a mistake. It is not the young fellow's fault; it is his machine that is worthless—awfully worthless. It will not work with our dynamo. It is impossible to have the show with such a machine.' "

"Alicia!" Louise made no effort to temper the heat of her protest. "Why did you say that? Don't you know that you might injure Jack's business?"

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed Alicia. "I injure the business! Oh, no, no!" She ascended a few tiers in Jack's direction. "I am worried! It will not do that! Will it, Mr. Stedman?"

Jack was evidently attracted by her foreign prettiness as she turned imploringly toward him, clasping her little hands in distress.

"No. Don't worry." To Louise his smile seemed unnecessarily cordial, his manner friendly to an invidiously superlative degree. "I'm really very grateful to you. Of course, I ought to have inquired about the current. You see, the alternating current by which this machine is run—"

"What!" Alicia pressed her white dimpled hands against her dark head in mimic despair, laughing a rippling merry laugh at her own ignorance. "I do not understand! I am to the discredit of the college! Let me look." She mounted the intervening tiers, and made her way between the chairs to where Jack stood.

"Lou, will you come down with me to the dean's office? I'll explain what happened, and ask permission for tomorrow. I don't want to bother Sister Celine about it again."

Elizabeth led the way out into the corridor.

An extraordinarily indefinable lowness of spirit, a dull sinking of the heart curiously mingled with indignation at her own ungenerosity—of these feelings Lou was quiveringly conscious, but more conscious, oh, much more conscious was she of that tableau high up in the center

of the lecture hall—Alicia, dark-haired and dark-eyed, and in her exotic prettiness unusually striking today, with clasped hands bending over the little black demon of a machine, absorbed in it, and Jack standing by, looking down, quite manifestly absorbed in Alicia.

The audience the next day was rather slim—some few in excess of one hundred. Those who came, however, were unquestionably cheerful types, distinctively appreciative, and evincing their cordial spirit in a burst of laughter and applause when the title of the first film was thrown on the screen—

Foxy Frank, or the Hotel Thief

"Why, Jack!" Elizabeth was seated near him. "That isn't historical! You promised the *Siege of Orleans!*"

"That was yesterday," explained Jack calmly. "I couldn't get it for today. This is all right, and I have some real educators."

"This is horribly vulgar!" whispered Elizabeth to Louise. "What will Sister Celine think!" Foxy Frank had hurtled himself head foremost down the main stairway of the hotel which had unwarily registered him, had wriggled under a rug, and was emerging now with a banal grin on his wide and vacant countenance. "This is awful!" Elizabeth's comments of distress ran along with the sizzling noise of the machine. "Why did he bring such a thing! And he promised educational pictures. Oh, Louie, *do* you suppose everyone will think Jack hopelessly unrefined?"

Lou's cheeks began to tingle for Jack's reputation, but—

"Don't be silly," she whispered hoarsely. "Let them think what they like! *We* know."

Elizabeth leaned over and observed in pained accents to Sister Celine, three rows below.

"Really, Sister, I don't know what to say about this."

"Say nothing," came back the soothing response in the darkness. "The educational pictures will follow—no doubt."

They did. Foxy Frank's low-class performances were superseded by exhibitions of the activities of wasps, of beavers, of Panama canal workingmen—all viewed by the spectators in well bred silence. The shooting of General Riva in the chief thoroughfare of Havana roused them to a higher level of excitement—stirred Alicia, indeed, to talk volubly about just how the tragic event had occurred, how a grand uncle or fourth grand cousin or some equally remote relative of hers had actually witnessed the scene, and how—yes, that was the very street —she had frequently driven through it, and how superb a gentleman, so her fourth grand uncle or cousin affirmed, was that brave General Riva!

The last film told a wild western story though its beginning was a scene distinctly idyllic. A young man (in corduroys, boots, soft-collared flannel shirt, and, oh, yes, a sombrero) and a young girl (in a checked gingham) walk quietly down through a sun-lit vista in the woods to a brook bridged by a tree-trunk over which they pass, he helping her to cross and thus obviously indicating that the story will not end with a funeral. They are followed by a graceful Irish setter who jumps with them to the next scene, the interior of a railroad station, where Peggy—for so is the heroine in checked gingham named—earns her daily bread as ticket agent and telegraph operator. Here the young cowboy-like man bids her adieu and departs, the dog trotting after him. Presto! Dog and man are at the ranch half a mile away. The man is writing a letter. He completes it, reads it over, folds it, and places it in the dog's mouth. The dog runs quickly out of the picture unarguably in the direction of Peggy. (The clue to this deduction is the man's facial expression.) Peggy, as the next few feet of film reveal, is reading a telegram which (flashed

on the screen) announces the approach of a train bearing an unbelievable amount of gold currency. Thus engrossed, Peggy fades out, ignorant as a wooden image of what is now confidentially disclosed to the spectators, namely, the stealthy creeping of four masked bandits round the outside of the station. The unsuspecting Peggy is flashed on again. Glancing up from the telegram she suddenly registers shock. The bandits have entered the room. She registers fears. She registers courage. She registers a determination to resist the cowardly outlaws. A struggle follows—how brief a struggle need not be recounted. The fiendish victors bind her to a chair, peruse the telegram, gloating horribly the while, and dash out (really a quite dramatic exit) darkly designing to hold up the treasure train. Peggy registers helplessness and exhaustion. The spectators fancy she will die. ("Oh, no, no!" cried Alicia.) But they are spared the torture of viewing for more than two minutes her slightly unconvincing gaspings and efforts after liberty. ("Pretty old stuff," remarked Amy. "No wonder they don't charge for it.") The exterior of the station appears, with doggie snooping round for a means of entrance. He finds a hole at the base of one side, squeezes through, and runs lightly into the presence of Peggy. She registers hope. She registers bliss. With a mighty pull, she frees one of her hands, takes the note from the Irish setter's mouth, and reads eagerly what, against a glittering background of light, is immediately and inconsiderately thrown on the screen for an all too inquisitive public.

DEAREST PEGGY,
I shall be over to see you Sunday.
Affectionately,
JOE.

This simple and direct communication, economically occupying as it did a comparatively few inches of film, was for some occult psychological reason greeted by the

audience with an hilarious outburst of laughter and applause.

"Good old Joe!"

"Ink gave out."

"Nice of him to write anyway."

The silly mood was on them. One bell-like voice asked distinctly through the darkness,

"Who cares for the Siege of Orleans?"

"Pas pour moi!" The answer floated back in a New Jersey accent suspiciously like Debby Morgan's.

"If they would behave!" Sister Celine stood up, to no avail, however, except as an annoying black bulk between certain of the spectators and the climax of the drama.

"Ay! What is that awful shadow?" Alicia called resentfully. "Someone is blotting out the best part of the story!"

Sister resumed her place.

"It is impossible to speak to them!" She said it more to herself than to the sophomore beside her who had just remarked,

"Grandma must have enjoyed this picture when she was a girl."

Free now from the ropes that had bound her (Alicia grumbled audibly that *she* had not seen the dog biting at the knots), Peggy dashes off a note. The Irish setter dashes off with the note to the hero. He and five stalwart cowboys mount their bronchos, dash to the railroad which adjoins their ranch, signal the treasure train, board it, and, in various dramatic and picturesque attitudes, ride upon it thrillingly over the edge of the screen. The bandits once more seize Peggy, bind her hand and foot, and, as a device for stopping the train, place her across the railroad tracks.

"She will be run over! *Ay! Ay!*" exclaimed Alicia on a rising pitch, at the same time cruelly squeezing Lou's arm.

"Oh, for goodness sake!" said Amy impatiently. "It's only a dummy!"

"Look at Joe! Is he going to jump?" Alicia put the question to the audience at large. "He's crawling down that—that—"

Joe stood gallantly at pose on the cow-catcher.

"He's going to pick her up," said Amy. He did. "What did I tell you?" This was Amy's only moment of real pleasure during the entire exhibition. "I told you it was a dummy. I've seen 'em do it over on the Erie Road near Rahway. I'm not sure whether it's Rahway," she continued to an interested freshman beside her. "It's a place somewhere near a railroad over there near. . . ." Her staccato died down gradually to an almost inaudible murmur.

Meanwhile, to Alicia's immeasurable relief, Peggy was safe. The train had sped into nothingness. The bandits under the sharp pistol attack of the cowboys had rolled ignominiously down the embankment of the railroad and over the edge of the screen into nowhere. Peggy and Joe detrained in a few swift seconds and stood for several inches of film appreciatively receiving the congratulations of cowboys, brakemen, fireman, and engineer.

"Dum-dum-dee dum," sang Debby.

And the major part of the audience joined her with a good will in a spontaneous rendition of the inevitable "Wedding March" until the sizzling noise of Jack's machine stopped suddenly, having first serviceably flashed on in a golden light,

THE END.

Almost simultaneously someone near the electric switch had illuminated the lecture hall. The audience rose and began moving down from the tiers and out into the corridor. Not so Elizabeth. She sat quite still, her head resting on Lou's shoulder.

"Not, oh, not a shining success!"

"It was all right," asserted Lou.

Amy scanning the crowd, observed, "We've cleared about fifteen dollars, I imagine."

"Oh, more than that!" Debby waved a mathematical arm above the departing throng. "Can't you multiply?"

One of the patrons in the block down at the doorway called a request to the committee to have another "show" soon, because this was great, honest! The audience, indeed, if laughter and jests and cheerful mien attested their sentiments, had had no unpleasing hour. At least, to each one of them it had been worth twenty-five cents.

"It was not a success," reiterated Elizabeth raising her head.

Louise only half heard her, for Jack had drawn near. They stood up, prepared to congratulate him. Amy, who had gone down to the demonstration table to talk with Sister Celine, was yodeling out,

"Who has the money box?"

"Well, how was it?" Jack was eager for approbation.

"Perfect," said his sister. "It was awfully good of you, Jack."

"The Peggy and Joe one was dear," observed Louise, intending by her critcism to alleviate any qualms Jack, like Elizabeth, might have on the subject of tone.

Jack had no chance to re-act, however, for Alicia exclaimed, instantly securing his attention,

"Oh, yes! But I liked the Cuban one best—the one about General Riva. It was so real!" She moved her hands in little fluttering gestures, very graceful, very engaging, and rolled her big brown eyes with their long lashes, from Jack to the ceiling and back. "Oh, Cuba! Cuba!"

"Did you honestly like it?" Jack smiled in high pleasure at her enthusiasm. "I'm really tremendously glad," he added, "because I owed you a thank-offering for yesterday—for the way you saved the situation—and when I selected that Cuban film, I was thinking especially of you."

"Louie, what did you do with the money-box?" Amy spoke in irritation.

"It's in the drawer of the demonstration table—on the right hand side."

"I'm sorry to trouble you, but it isn't." Irritation had developed into asperity.

"I put it there." Dully she descended tier by tier, while Jack and Alicia launched into an animated exchange of opinion relative to the climate, the politics, the resources, the general merits of the latter's native island.

Louise found the money where she had placed it—far, far back in a drawer of the demonstration table on the left-hand side. Amy and Debby fell avidly upon the heartening task of counting the receipts.

"Help us. Can't you?" said Amy tartly. She was the sort of person whose disposition deteriorates with the acquisition of wealth.

Louise mechanically acquiesced to the extent of making two dollar piles of all the quarters within her reach, but for almost every second quarter that passed through her fingers, she cast a glance up at Jack and Alicia in the center of the room. Elizabeth had left them, and was busying herself with closing the windows. Jack finally discovered that he had to make a train. He had a prospective sale in Madison. He packed his machine, Alicia a sympathetic spectator of the process, and came down to the committee now grouped round the box-receipts.

"How much?"

"Twenty-seven dollars and twenty-five cents," Amy gloatingly reported.

"Good! If I make this sale in Madison," Jack confided to them, "I'll get a big commission."

Louise wished that he would not talk like that. She heartily disliked the commercial taint in his speech. He perceived evidently in her countenance some hint of disapprobation.

"Aren't you interested, Lou?"

"Of course," she replied in a too casual tone.

"You'll miss that train, Jackie." In confirmation of her prophecy his sister held her wrist-watch up to him.

He laughed irrelevantly, mirthlessly.

"Well, I'm sorry I'll have to leave you all. Goodby, Sister Celine. Goodby, Lou. Goodby, everybody."

Elizabeth went downstairs to the door with him.

"Isn't he lovely!" exclaimed Alicia beaming at the group near the table.

"What are we going to use the money for?" The question was Lou's—dust in the eyes of the committee, a deliberate instigation to argument the outcome of which meant nothing to her. Less than immaterial was it to her whether the twenty-seven dollars and twenty-five cents should pay for a new lamp for the French club, or for appointments in the mission tea-shop, or for French dictionaries for the library, or for a party for the committee. In the ensuing hubbub of debate she was aware only of an unusually quick beating of her heart, of a nervous pulling of her lips, of a blurring of her ideas, and of something that said in her mind—No! No! *She* never said it—she never even thought it—"I wish Alicia were dead!"

Retreat that year was scheduled for the last three days in October—to end on All Saints' Day. Amy was pretty cross about this arrangement, for All Saints' Day had the ill nature to fall on a Saturday. "We don't get anything out of it," she grumbled—"no free day."

Louise, whose non-Catholicity excused her from the exercises of the retreat, got Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday out of it—a long holiday which she decided to devote to Cousin Brenda and Aunt Ellie. Under other circumstances, a protracted period of

quiet at college, permitting disengagement from study and from the diverting companionship of friends, would have been welcomed as heaven-sent for the mulling over of the long neglected plot of her novel. But since the motion-picture exhibition, her cogitations had habitually fallen upon a subject fraught with forlorn and painful apprehensions. Moreover, her conscience oppressed her with an almost intolerable sense of iniquity. Had she or had she not wished Alicia dead? Did she or did she not. . . . Never! She would never wish anyone dead—not even her stepmother! But the horrible thought persisted. A partial presentment of her spiritual difficulties to Elizabeth had elicited partially helpful advice.

"If you were bothered with the idea that you wished a person dead, but you didn't really, what would you do?"

"If you don't mind my saying so, Pollywog, you're getting morbid about her. Sometime I feel terribly sorry for her. Don't you think if your father cared for her, you could—just a tiny bit—for his sake?"

Louise, quite miserable at her new character as deceiver of her best friend, could only murmur unhappily, "Oh, Bet! Bet!"

"Of course, it's only a suggestion," went on Elizabeth in embarrassed haste. "I ought not to have been so officious—"

"Bet, please! You couldn't be!"

"Let's be practical anyway. To get rid of the bothersome wish, substitute another. A person ought to benefit some by courses in psychology, though what the stuff all means I don't know. Wish her a trip to Europe or even to Canada, or if you wish her dead," pursued Elizabeth breaking into a laugh at her own sermonizing, "wish her the grace of a happy death when her time comes. You couldn't possibly wish her anything better."

"I don't wish anyone dead," affirmed Louise. "But something keeps saying it in my mind. What would you do?"

"As I said—change the wish, eat a good meal, take a long walk, go to confession, and forget it."

"I can't go to confession." The statement was made dispassionately.

"True enough." The acquiescence was quite as dispassionate.

"I could if I wanted to." Lou lifted her chin, and eyed Bet challengingly. "I was baptized a Catholic."

"No chains on you if you want to go, honey-love."

A pause.

"I guess," said Louise, abandoning the last topic, "I'll try wishing her something good—a trip to Europe—" and she smiled with something like content at her mental sketch of an Alicia sailing for Transatlantic shores—"to Europe or to somewhere else."

"That's the way to talk. Anywhere will do—France, Italy, California, Florida—wish her a trip around the world while you're at it."

But Louise had a fancy, unmentioned to her advisor, that Cuba would fulfill all requirements.

She went home; that is, she went to Cousin Brenda and Aunt Ellie at their apartment, and there the disquiet besetting her vanished instantly, or rather was replaced by another of a different character at Cousin Brenda's third remark which happened to be a question.

"Have you heard from your stepmother lately?"

"Neither lately nor in time long past. She never writes to me." Louise, recalling Elizabeth's recent little preachment, felt that in conscience she ought to add—though she did not—"Nor do I write to her."

"She's an impossible person!" said Cousin Brenda. "I talked to her last week for a while. She's furious because the estate is so long in being settled, and she blames your father."

"What?" Louise flushed angrily. "How could she blame him?"

"She said that if he hadn't been so improvident—"

Cousin Brenda wiped invisible tears from her eyes—"all this delay would have been averted. I just knew she married him for his money." Only the added counsel that discretion would be more fruitful of good to herself than retaliation prevented Louise from immediately calling up her stepmother for the purpose of explaining in frank terms just what a contemptible creature she was. "She's temporarily your guardian, and she might be able to take you away from college."

Louise grew quite cold at the idea.

"She couldn't. Could she, Cousin Brenda?"

"I'm not sure. But be careful. Don't provoke her. Only don't let her trick you. You're like your father, you know."

"Was Father very rich?"

"Very." But Cousin Brenda was manifestly dissatisfied with the conception of wealth conveyed by the word. She expatiated. "Jack Stedman knows how rich he was." And her tone was unpleasantly significant.

The horrible flight of fancy stimulated by the insinuation, Louise forthrightly checked. Jack was certainly giving no evidence now of interest in her as an heiress. His definite and present interest appeared to be his own bank account. And then there was Alicia. . . .

"You look just worn out." Aunt Ellie, if not deftly, nevertheless bravely changed the subject.

"I'm going to sleep a million hours if you both don't mind."

The million reduced themselves to twelve out of each twenty-four, the remainder being consumed in shopping, a matinée or two, and meals in the hotel dining room. This last was at Louise's request.

"I want some hotel food for a change," she said.

The small dining-room upstairs was too intimate. With three people, relatives at that, seated round its homey little table, confidences would have been inevitable.

A telephone call came from Elizabeth after luncheon, on Sunday.

"We're going back on the five-thirty-three."

"We?"

"Alicia and I. She came down with me yesterday morning. Do you want to talk to her? She and Jack are in the living room studying a map of Cuba."

"Never mind. I'll see you both later."

The duty that lay nearest to her was undoubtedly to get the five-thirty-three. She began packing immediately.

"Aren't there other trains?" asked Cousin Brenda plaintively.

"I want to get this one."

"Won't you see enough of Elizabeth at college?"

"I don't want to go back alone." Even to herself Louise would scarcely have admitted that the honest reply ought to have been, "I hope Bet and Alicia will have an escort to the terminal."

True to her anticipations, the escort arrived. She herself had boarded the train at almost the final minute, and it had actually begun to move when her two classmates came gasping in.

"Jack just jumped off," panted Elizabeth. "We had to run. There he is!" The three crowded close to the window to say goodby to him. He was walking swiftly along beside their coach. His sister pounded with her gloved fists upon the window pane. He stopped, and looked up eagerly, hat in hand, craning his neck as if to see someone in particular. They laughed and nodded and waved hands at him, and he smiled and waved back, and continued to look as if for someone in particular—not his sister. Then to Louise, he seemed suddenly to have found that someone—herself. But with the train inexorably drawing out leaving him there, she felt all at once hot and resentful, for pressing heavily against her shoulder, a beaming countenance close to her own, she became aware of her devoted Alicia.

CHAPTER IX

AND A DILEMMA

IT will be generally conceded that, on occasion, the most boring, the most flatly uninteresting of human beings—granting that any of our fellow creatures can be uninteresting—is the college girl especially in her junior year. Yet her problems to her are mountainous, and the solution of them is for the world which she will inhabit after graduation not entirely without import. She encounters a difficulty, cries out at it in rebellion or in sheer unhappiness, struggles against it, only in the end to fall back defeated. She has learned, however, a lesson invaluable, namely, that her wishes are not the controlling force of the universe. She rises slowly, with a wariness born of experience, explores her problem, and in the exploration discovers some fundamental law, some principle by which she may henceforth live.

Thus did Louise. From the second of November until February the sixth, she battled courageously for her self-respect. She worked like one driven, over class assignments, fulfilled meticulously her duties as guard on the junior scrub team at basketball every practice night, and, more than all else, gave herself up to an intense revision of her novel, leaving Chapter 1 intact, but combining Chapters 2 and 3, and tearing up all of Chapter 4 with the exception of one description of the landscape. A particularly brave bout with self and littlenesses became imperative on Wednesday of the Thanksgiving holiday when she parted with Elizabeth and Alicia near the tun-

nel entrance at the Hoboken terminal. Alicia was going again to visit the Stedmans.

"I almost wished she would decline Mother's invitation," Elizabeth had confided to Louise. "But Mother and Father feel sorry for her—think she must be sad so far away from home. She talks about it constantly. That's what bothers me. She has Jack all stirred up about Cuba."

Louise went for the Thanksgiving recess to Atlantic City with Cousin Brenda and Aunt Ellie. From that vacation she carried back to Convent the memory of three long wakeful nights when, sitting alone in her room at the hotel, a dull weight on her heart, she had watched through the window, far out on the black waters and against a dark mist of sky, the spectral lights of coastal steamers moving slowly, slowly away from her, away from her, away from her, undoubtedly to that little long island—Was she wrong, or wasn't it shaped like a fish? —in that sea somewhere near the beginning of the Gulf of Mexico.

Immediately after Thanksgiving Jack was dispatched by his motion picture machine company to Buffalo. He wrote her from there saying that he hoped to see her at Christmas. He wanted to have a good old-time talk. What was the matter with her anyway?

He did not see her at Christmas, or in the course of the succeeding holidays, and for this ill luck his motion picture company which ordered him to Washington on December twenty-sixth was again to blame. Elizabeth and her mother accompanied him, seizing the opportunity of investigating the national capital under his guidance. Him they left there at the end of the vacation, and Elizabeth, on meeting Lou at college, obtusely descanted upon the merits and demerits of the places she had visited, neglecting utterly any report of the main subject. Louise, bracing herself to an assumption of conventional interest, asked casually,

"How is Jack?"

To which temerarious inquiry, Elizabeth quite as casually replied,

"He has a cold in his head."

And that was the end of it.

Jack continued to write—unsatisfactorily and mercenarily. "Can't he ever forget money?" Louise cried out to herself in her own room. "I hate it!" It all seemed in poor taste, too!

In January, midyear examinations—though specially designed to blight only the final week—cast in reality an anticipatory shadow over the entire month, furnishing Louise with that particular sort of relief incident to the necessity of contemplating two causes for wretchedness instead of one. It was as if to tooth-ache were added ear-ache, or perhaps to parallel the cases more appropriately—as if head-ache divided the honors with heart-ache.

As a complete cure for the first ill, however, and as a lenitive at least for the second, the sixth of February brought the junior tea and Jack. Elizabeth hastened up to Lou's room to announce his arrival, a rather late arrival, candidly speaking, betokening, if it were to be judged on the surface, no overwhelming eagerness to be present at the festive scene.

"What do you suppose?" said Elizabeth. "He brought Phil with him, and Phil brought five other men from college, and the whole seven asked for me. The reception committee must think I'm crazy! Jack might have had more sense and asked for someone else!"

Louise heartily agreed with her, though her response was a shade irrelevant.

"I can't go down for a while." She was standing before the mirror carefully regarding the effect of her new tea-dress, a lovely thing of violet orchid. "This chairmanship of the serving committee is a bother. Sorry I accepted it. But I must see the headwaiter once more. Who else is here beside your quota?"

"For one—" and Elizabeth's face clouded—"Señor Remon, Alicia's father. I left him talking to Jack. You know they've met several times already, and I'm afraid it's Cuba next for little brother."

"Really?" Louise leaned heavily against the dresser for support.

Elizabeth, turning away to the window, nodded a confirmation.

"It's settled, I'm afraid. Sometime in June. I wish I had never brought Alicia home."

Louise echoed the sentiment, dully, in her own heart.

"Perhaps he won't go." She needed no one to tell her how banal that speech sounded.

"It would have to be something iron-strong to prevent him," said Elizabeth. "Mother has begged him not to, but he seems bent on it—says there's money in it. Tra la!" She sighed out the exclamation on a note of half resignation as she went toward the door. "Will you be down soon?"

"Yes—soon."

Jack ought to have asked for her! She thought it, frowning fiercely at herself in the mirror, when Elizabeth had gone. Hadn't *she,* Lou, invited him to come? And Alicia, no doubt, was downstairs entertaining him! Louise's eyes filled with angry tears. She checked them quickly and violently, however, seeing with instant vision, their inevitable concomitant, a disheveled complexion, which all the rice powder in the world would be ineffectual to repair with the immediateness required when one is to face a curious and critical world. The kitchen! The serving rooms! They would provide temporary sanctuary for her! She drew on over her tea-dress a blue bungalow apron, and stumbling in her excited haste, ran down to the wholesome and distracting atmosphere furnished by food and dishes and swiftly gliding waiters and soap and silver and energy and general confusion.

An hour later she dragged weary footsteps up to her

room again, removed her apron, patted her errant locks into position, dulled with a dab of powder her too shiny nose, and joined Sister Celine where she sat reading, obviously a garrison of one, at the head of the stairway leading down to the foyer.

"Aren't you bored to death here, Sister?"

"I should be more bored down there," replied Sister with a nod toward the balustrade.

Louise leaned over, entertaining herself for several moments by observing her fellow students and their guests. After a while, she stole down to the turn of the stairway. This position permitted her to see more of the company and to hear scraps of conversation which were not devoid of interest. Jack and Señor Remon, for example, stood in the doorway of the reception room, Jack with his back to the stairs. Over to them tripped Alicia, charmingly pretty in a mauve frock that set off very advantageously her pearl white complexion and her dark hair and eyes.

"What? You talk of business again?" She shook her finger at Jack. "You will soon have enough hours for this! But at a tea!"

"We have much to settle," apologized her father.

"Yes, but papa, you can do all that on the boat. Oh, how I dislike to think of that long voyage—don't you, Jack?"

Louise did not hear Jack's reply. Gallant it must unavoidably have been, and humorous it probably was for both he and Alicia laughed at it, she twirling round on the heels of her little slippers, and glancing up just in time to detect the watcher on the stairway stepping back, with surreptitious intent, against the low window on the landing.

"Have you see Louisita?" Alicia's voice floated up once more. "Look! She is there!"

He came up to her swiftly, and almost before she could catch her breath, was shaking hands with her and saying

over and over again in expressively terse phraseology, tinctured with many a too juvenile interjection, how glad, how very glad he was to see her. Her restrained manner he evidently ascribed to the silent garrison on the landing above.

"Good afternoon, Sister," he called with immense bravado.

Sister Celine looked up from her book as if she had not before been aware of his presence, and replied with grave cordiality. He proffered an observation or two by way of proving further his sense of ease.

"I haven't seen you since we gave our movies. They were a pretty mess—weren't they?"

Sister smiled. "They were very good," she said, and turned again to her reading.

Louise, wincing at the recollection, differed strongly with her.

"Aren't you coming down?" Jack asked.

"After a while," she answered. Never, never, she thought proudly, would she give him the opportunity of fancying for one second that his society was necessary to her enjoyment of the afternoon; and there was more than ordinary friendliness in her nod of response to a handwave from Alicia at the foot of the stairs. "Doesn't she look sweet?" she said.

Jack glanced down. "Yes, she's a nice little thing." Then—"Did you know I was going to Cuba?"

"Bet told me—yes."

"I would have told you myself—" He broke off, and turning, stared moodily out of the window at space.

"When—when do you expect to sail?"

"In June—the middle of June." He swung round, and spoke through compressed lips. "Mr. Remon is a big sugar man in Havana. If I go with him, I can do great things there on my own account. I shall probably stay there all next year."

Louise felt that she must cry out! She must, truly!

For Alicia did not intend to return next year to college!

"I won't be quite a millionaire," pursued Jack, still speaking through tightened lips, "but I'll have some money."

"Yes?" Louise, raising her eyebrows in indication of friendly interest, tried for a corresponding accent of sympathy. "Cuba is so far away," she ventured, and to her the simple statement was in the nature of a crude revelation of her wish to shout at the top of her voice, "Jack, don't go! Don't go! Don't go!"

"Yes, it is far away." His hands clasped behind him, his gaze riveted on the toe of his shoe, he added gloomily, "I wouldn't go at all if I thought anyone cared."

"Why, Jack!" she protested. "How can you say such a thing?" He appeared enormously pleased, even smiled in his usual cheery character at her challenge. "You know perfectly well your Mother doesn't want you to go, and Elizabeth. . . . You *know* they're strongly opposed to the idea!"

His smile vanished abruptly, and for a second he stared at her strangely as if at a loss for words. Then with some effort he began.

"Louie—"

But here a stupid little red-faced freshman darted into the scene, taking her stand at the head of the stairs and calling down in ill-suppressed frenzy,

"Is that Louise Maxon? Is that Louise Maxon? Pardon me, please, but you've *got* to come down to the serving-room. There's something wrong—you've got to come—not food enough or something—"

"I'm sorry." She meant it, and she knew that Jack knew that she meant it. "I suppose I must go." She stood hesitating. "I'm really sorry. I'll be back later."

The freshman beckoned her agonizingly. The look of utter loathing which Jack had for several seconds been directing toward this fatuous messenger from the serving-

room changed to one of strained anxiety as he now fixed his gaze upon Lou.

"You'll surely be around again?"

"Oh, surely!"

"I'm leaving on the five-ten. It's business that's taking me away so early."

"Don't you ever forget it?"

"I can't afford to."

"Louise!" Amy Pasker had joined the freshman at the head of the stairs. "Pardon me—really. But won't you come?"

A hand on the balustrade, Louise watched Jack descend the steps and enter the reception room there to be greeted once more by Alicia. Then in company with Amy and the freshman, who indulged in a kind of mad fugue of explanation all the way, the chairman of the serving committee, perplexed, hopeful, anxious, elated by turns, but in general thoroughly distraught, went to the duty that had so inopportunely called her. Confusion and despair awaited her! There had been an error in her order to the caterer. An all too precious hour of her life—more than an hour, indeed—passed rapidly by, consumed inordinately in telephoning to Morristown, in telephoning again, and in telephoning once more, and in answering telephone calls from Morristown, and in mollifying the head-waiter from the caterer's in Morristown, and in mollifying Debby Morgan who rushed into the kitchen declaring with acrid emotion that it was outrageous to keep the guests waiting—"What was the matter anyway?"

The matter, whatever it was, having at length been adjusted, Louise, with flushed and shiny countenance, disheveled strands of her freshly waved hair sticking with disenchanting effect to her moist brow, hurried, a cup of coffee in her hand, from the kitchen toward the mission unit tea-room where Evelyn Parker had brought her mother for refreshment. "It was so hot upstairs."

"I'll go help Lou, Moth," said Evelyn backing out through the doorway into the corridor.

The coffee missed Evelyn, but splashed with definitive results quite down the front of Lou's new orchid dress.

"Oh, my poor child!" Miss Norton had appeared from somewhere in the shadowed precincts, and deftly with a clean dish-towel, was sopping off the major part of beverage from the ill-starred gown. Mrs. Parker, vast and helpless, joined the group murmuring gentle reproaches to her daughter, and compassionate apologies to the victim of the accident.

"It's all right. The cleaner will take it out," said Lou edging away from Miss Norton. "I broke the caterer's cup."

Evelyn was standing, her back to the wall, wringing her hands the way people do in a play, and wailing intermittently,

"It was my fault! It was my fault!"

"It's going to be all right," remarked Miss Norton, gracefully tossing the dish-towel upon a serving table nearby. "Any cleaner can take it out."

"Coffee?" cried Evelyn in open doubt.

"Coffee," affirmed Miss Norton, always a reassuring embodiment of conviction, but today particularly so in her perfect black velvet with her perfect black coiffure, and her perfect ivory white complexion. "Come, Louise. You are fatigued and nervous, and Mrs. Parker must have her coffee. We'll all sit here in the tea-room."

Louise, in a kind of daze, permitted herself to be led in, and, at Miss Norton's bidding, a waiter served them all with sandwiches, coffee, and sherbert. Fritzie, fanning herself futilely with a tiny handkerchief, joined them not many minutes later, and was treated to a vivid and collaborated story of the misfortune that had befallen the orchid gown.

"Why don't you go right up and take it off?"

"She will when she has had some refreshment. It was

no one's fault, of course," observed Miss Norton. "Fritzie, the waiter will bring you some—"

"I'm not hungry. Only hot." Fritzie continued futilely to fan herself.

"Evelyn ought to have looked where she was going," said Mrs. Parker for the sixth time, and sadly assisted herself to a second cheese sandwich.

"It's all right. The cleaner will take it out," Lou murmured once more, still flustered and wondering why her sherbert tasted so exceedingly flat.

"At any rate, Louise," declared Miss Norton, "you are to be congratulated on the smoothness and the good form of the serving upstairs. Everything was perfect."

"Deb Morgan told me we were disgraced because all the guests were waiting, and there was nothing to eat." In her voice there was the merest shadow of complaining. She was conscious of number of grievances against society. . . .

"Nothing of the sort. I noticed no discrepancy or awkwardness," said Miss Norton. "The whole affair has been unusually successful."

"Yes, indeed," put in Mrs. Parker. "And what I liked about it especially was the mothers. It gave such tone to have the mothers of the juniors as patronesses. And then the dresses were so sweet and attractive and . . ."

Louise lost the rest of this disquisition, for at this moment in the tea-room doorway stood a large familiar form topped by a round familiar countenance.

"Hello." Nell strolled in with her facile air of being at home whether her being so met with approbation or not, and on Louise's impetuously running to her with open arms, presented a cheek to be kissed. "Awfully glad to see you. Child, but you're growing up! Come along. I'll have some coffee." She was introduced to Mrs. Parker, and saluted Miss Norton, Fritzie, and Evelyn. Louise hurried into the corridor, hailed a waiter, ordered food for the newcomer, and returned in time

to catch Nell's announcement of her intention to remain at college for a day or two. "I want to have a good old-fashioned palaver with everyone on the campus. I hope everyone's in a blethering mood. I've heard enough already to stimulate a mild curiosity. What's this, Louie, about your studying domestic science? That true? I thought you intended to be a writer."

Louise was saved from the guilt of a mendacious reply by a generously interposed remark from Miss Norton to the effect that a writer had to know something about everything. Nell, ever notoriously devoid of fine feeling upon some subjects, pursued the topic with a bald inquiry.

"When do you hope to publish?"

"Three minutes after five," murmured Miss Norton glancing at her perfect little platinum wrist-watch. "Will you all pardon me, please? I promised to meet someone in the foyer at five-fifteen."

Louise sprang up. "I did, too—before five! It isn't really *after* five! Is it, Miss Norton?"

"Three minutes," Miss Norton repeated and looking at her watch again, with due regard for verity, added, "and a half. Three minutes and a half after five."

"Mrs. Parker if you will—" It was the fragment of an apology. Ignoring the rest of the company, Louise darted away from the table and out of the room.

She ran down the corridor and up the stairway to the main foyer. A few groups of hostesses and guests were standing about. The reception room still showed a goodly throng. But Jack was nowhere within ken. Amy Pasker was coming out of Sister Angela's office.

"Did you see Bet?" Louise asked it breathlessly.

"Bet? Yes. She went out a short while ago with her mother and brother."

"Phil?"

"Jack. I heard him say he had to get the five-ten."

Lou's impulse was to dash out, coatless, into the February cold and over to the railroad station, and perhaps

she would have obeyed the impulse had not Amy lingered near.

"All those fellows that asked for Bet were not her brothers—were they?"

"Are you sure it was Jack who went?"

"Sure! Alicia went over with them to the station. Her father's going down on the same train."

"Oh," responded Lou weakly. "Look, Amy, at my dress." Amy looked as requested. "Coffee. Do you think it will ever come out?"

Amy, shaking her head dubiously, said from the depths of a sincere sympathy, "*That's* rotten!"

"I'd better go up and take it off. I'll send it to the cleaner's to-morrow."

She climbed the stairs wearily, paused for a moment on the first landing to think chokingly of Jack and bitterly of a certain stupid freshman, smiled a weary smile in passing Sister Celine who still sat reading at her post near the top step, walked wearily on tired, tired feet to her room, and wearily, without removing her coffee-splotched tea-dress, threw herself on the bed.

"Did you say, 'Come in'?"

Louise sat up in the darkness.

"I didn't hear you knock.

"I've been looking for you everywhere downstairs." Elizabeth touched the electric button, creating thereby a mild under-light from the low shaded lamp on the center table. "Jack told me to say 'goodby' for him. He said he saw you for just a few minutes and you promised to come back and didn't. Why didn't you?"

Louise explained in dejected broken sentences, standing to show the coffee design on her dress.

"Poor old kid! Isn't it funny—no, not funny—*weird*, the way things happen in this world?" She sat down in a low chair, her elbows resting on her knees, her chin in her folded hands. "Here we both expected a jolly

time today, and what do we get? You're all out of luck, and I'm pretty forlorn myself."

"What's the matter with you?"

"Sister Angela was unbearable!"

Louise went over to the ward-robe to get a kimono.

"What did she do now?"

"And my slippers hurt."

"What did Sister Angela do?"

"She said furious things to me for going over to the station with Jack and some of the boys. Said I knew I ought to have said 'goodby' at the door."

"Well, oughtn't you to 've?" Louise came back, only half interested, and sat limply on the side of the bed, the kimono hanging limply over her left arm.

"Yes—but Mother was going with them—and—and I wanted to be with her." Elizabeth's voice quite trembled on the words. "She feels so worried about Jack—and—and I think she's worried about all of us."

"You?"

Elizabeth sent a tragic side-long glance toward Louise, and nodded a "Yes." "She says we're all growing up and having secrets from her."

"If my mother were living, I'd tell her everything," declared Louise.

Vouchsafing no rejoinder, Elizabeth, after a dismal pause, remarked with a sigh,

"Boys *are* selfish. I just don't understand how Jack can be so hard!"

"Not hard, Bet." Louise was more interested now, and, on the veriest of impulses, added, "There must be some good reason for his going."

"I can't think of any."

"Do you suppose—maybe—do you suppose the reason could be Alicia?" Her achievement of an insincerely dispassionate tone made her feel suddenly quite grown-up and horrid. But, oh, she did want the answer to that question!

Elizabeth laughed in high amusement at the notion.

"Jack? Our Jack? Not if I am even slightly acquainted with little brother!" She sat erect, and set her slim hands to the business of removing the hairpins from their duty in the masterpiece of a coiffure which the Morristown hairdresser had assured her, only a few hours before, was equally refined and fashionable. "He's fond of running around and all that, but doesn't seem to care about any one girl. And while Aleesh is very nice, she's not the type he'd like, I'm sure. Anyway, I'm hoping and praying—" the hairpins out, she loosened her wavy brown locks, running her hands gently through them and shaking her head—"Wish Mother didn't object to a bob. Long hair's the dickens of a bother—I'm hoping and praying that he'll be a priest."

Louise sat very still.

"Does he seem to want to be?"

"How do I know? We never discuss such personal topics." She stood up slowly, and groaning exaggeratedly over her hurting slippers, limped toward the door. "I'm going to sleep for a while. Nell threatens to come round for a pow-wow. She warned Amy to be ready with all the news. You should have seen Amy's scorn. She said, 'News? What news? You know perfectly well, Nell Rawdon, that nothing ever happens in this place!' She was funny!" Elizabeth stopped at the door to laugh reflectively. "Amy's funny anyway. If the two of them come here, keep 'em. I want to sleep. Night, Pollywog."

"Goodnight."

For several minutes Louise remained very quietly there, sitting on the side of the bed, the kimono over her left arm. Then suddenly the kimono was raised and crumpled against her face; then suddenly again, the kimono still pressed against her face, she was curled up in an agonized heap at the foot of the bed. If she *could* pray against Elizabeth's prayers for Jack. . . . But then

. . . But then. . . . There was a thing in logic called a dilemma. She had understood it—yes. But she had never till now realized it. It wrought confusion in her soul, and it made her head ache hard—hard. Oh, no! Nothing *did* ever happen in this place! Oh, no! Nothing! Nothing!

CHAPTER X

AMONG OTHER THINGS, A BOAT LETTER

FROM the havoc-working horns of that dilemma, she fled after a few days of torture to the none too impregnable fastnesses of *Her Goal*. There she hoped to forget for a while—for a while restorative and long if she had power of will to protract it. When she picked up her manuscript for a courageous re-reading, she was not a little startled to see that the pages, especially of Chapter 1, showed marked discoloration at the edges and that the ink looked stale. Life was slipping away. She and her novel were undoubtedly growing old. The fearsome thought was a second incentive to labor. A third—if a third were needed—was that the heroine, strictly in character, was filling her leisure hours brimful of practice for the big play of the springtime, thus absenting herself to an unaccustomed degree from the company of the author. Ruefully the latter, one dull and melancholy night, for the twentieth time read Chapter 1, enamored of it in spots—for it was a "memory book"—yet hating it as a whole. In the end she tore it into shreds, then carefully drew up for it a complete and new design, and, determination stamped on every feature of her countenance, sat at her desk and wrote—a letter to Jack.

He replied with promptitude and with some rhetoric which, though presumably meaningful to him, only puzzled her the more. There were lofty generalizations, in this obviously labored composition, regarding the principles by which a man should guide his life. There were

glittering circumlocutory statements relative to Jack's own future plans. She read eagerly on and on, almost sensibly hurt by the lengthy, sounding sentences with their defect of significance for her. It was as if she were pushing her way through thick briers and tangled shrubbery searching among them in vain for a something—a something undefined, yet infinitely treasurable. Pressing forward thus, urged by an expectancy which, in its unfulfillment became increasingly painful, suddenly she was smitten, so to speak, squarely between the eyes, by one brief and concrete paragraph.

"I was talking to your Cousin Brenda the other day. She sent for me. She wanted to ask me something about a piece of business I handled for your father in the long ago. We talked about that and other things."

"Other things?" No! With all Cousin Brenda's bluntness, she would not dare even to intimate to Jack. . . . But this long drawn-out letter of his contained no request for permission to call. All that even slightly resembled such a request was his expression of the hope that he would see Lou "at the house" soon.

Once more were the narcotic properties of Chapter I, *Her Goal,* desperately tested, but in a short space were discovered to be even more pronouncedly feeble in their effects than before.

March brought spring, a capricious spring, one day at a single brush-stroke greening the broad stretch of front campus, the terraces near the rectory, and the meadow slanting up from the main buildings to Santa Maria; and on another, turning the sky gray and cold, and beating with furious lashes of wind the myriad of little bud-tips that had ventured forth with the trustful eagerness of youth. The sixth of the month, however, was fair and beautiful, the air a-sparkle with golden sunlight. Louise could have sworn that in the early morning she had heard an oriole, and on her way over from breakfast in the dining-hall she paused with a certain elation of soul to

note that the maples up in the meadow showed a pageant of crimson feathery boughs against the dark spruce trees beyond.

"I'm glad the team has a nice day anyway," she sighed.

At half past eleven she stood out on the loggia of Santa Rita Hall, one of a minority remaining on the campus, and with befitting patriotism waved a hand on high and cheered the basket-ball varsity and its flying squadron of rooters in their dash for the eleven-forty-eight to New York. Her decision to forego the pleasure of joining that confident and enthusiastic cortege involved for her a three-fold deprivation. In the first place, she really wanted to go to the game to see her own college win. In the second place, she would have experienced a special joy in seeing Elizabeth running up the score for the college as she undoubtedly would if favoring circumstances would disable (only slightly, however) the regular forward. Elizabeth had been playing subforward for a mere week or so, but she *could* play! In justice, her class unanimously agreed, she ought to be the regular forward. The regular forward, however, was a senior, and the seniors were jealous of honor.

Ruminating the matter, Louise sat in her room after lunch, the fresh cool air blowing through her open window. If she only could have gone to the game! But, no! The torment of disciplining herself all day long in the company of Alicia would have been insupportable! For since the tea, Louise's tribulation had been seriously augmented by Alicia's assumption of a really sisterly attitude toward Elizabeth, an attitude to which Elizabeth apparently did not object. They talked together often, with intense interest, the established subject of their conversation being quite inevitably Jack—Jack sailing for palm-fringed shores, or, arrived there, and garbed in cool white with a light panama on his fine blond head, achieving the fortune upon which he had set his

heart. As an absorption the subject easily superseded even Elizabeth's beloved dramatics. Her existence was steeped in the colors of it. Everything around her said "Jack—Cuba! Cuba—Jack!" It was ridiculous, Amy Pasker averred. Other girls who had brothers didn't behave in that absurd way! But for Elizabeth, her coffee at breakfast fragrantly breathed, "Soon Jack will be where coffee grows!" An orange at the same repast flowered into a whole grove of orange trees with Jack standing in some sunny spot of greenery therein. A teaspoonful of sugar suggested barrels and barrels of that commodity checked off by Jack on the wharves of —of some city down there—Havana, perhaps—anyway, some city down there. "Jack—Cuba! Cuba—Jack!"

Alicia had formed the habit, too, of fluttering up to them—Louise and Elizabeth—and of chanting the same refrain, with an irritating gayety of spirits. One day when the three were sitting in Elizabeth's room, and the big idea was in process of discussion between two of them, Elizabeth glancing at Louise caught an expression of sadness on her face.

"Pollywog! What's the matter?"

"What do you mean?"

"You looked so awfully—awfully tragic!"

"She wants a trip to Cuba! I know!" Alicia laughed merrily at her own jest.

"My head aches." Louise rose and walked to the door. "And I have a lot of work to do." She went out.

"Were we talking about our fathers and mothers?" she heard Elizabeth ask in anxious tones.

With the passing of the second term also, Alicia became almost insupportably more devoted to Louise.

"March, April, May, June!" For her entertainment, the months were frequently checked off on the plump little white hands. "If I do not come back to visit, I may never see you again. Oh, I must see you often before I go!"

She was ubiquitous. She sat beside Louise in classes, in the library, in the dining-hall. Louise was forever coming upon her *waiting*—waiting at Saint Anthony's statue over in the first corridor of the main building, waiting outside the chapel after Benediction, waiting at the foot of the stairway in Santa Rita Hall. And always it was,

"I'm waiting for you, dear Louisita." Once she had asked, "Do you mind?"

And Louise, gazing straight ahead, had answered weakly and untruthfully, "No." They had gone along then as usual, the one tense and silent, the other blithely chattering and glancing about, and thinking that all was well except for her poor darling's doleful fashion of taking her home troubles. "She ought to be over all that by this time," decided Alicia.

When Elizabeth had casually mentioned that Alicia would be one of their party for the basket-ball game in New York, Louise had instantly resolved to spend the day at Convent.

"I can't afford the trip," she told Elizabeth.

"You just cashed a check yesterday."

"Yes, but I ought to economize. You don't understand." This was all very true, indeed.

"I'm rich this week—"

But Louise declined to have her way paid. Elizabeth, proudly concealing her annoyance at her friend's unflattering indifference to a situation from which glory and jubilation would accrue to both of them—and more especially to the subforward—had come in shortly before train time to say goodby, and had casually reported Jack's telephone message.

"He was rushing out to business this morning when he called. He said he'd meet us after the game—the three of us—and take us to dinner. I'm sorry you're not coming."

She could not have been more sorry than Louise who

was sorrier at that instant than she wished Elizabeth or anyone in the world to know.

At twelve o'clock lunch that day only a few tables in the dining-hall were occupied. The quiet of the dormitory afterwards, as Lou sat there alone in her room, the manuscript of her novel spread out futilely before her, grew more and more dismal and weird with the slow lapsing of the hours. If only some of the less ladylike members of the student body remaining on the campus would loudly shout a name out there in the corridor the way they did sometimes when she wished they wouldn't! If only Ev Parker would come shuffling along discordantly strumming on her ukulele and flatly singing "Swanee River"! (Goodness knows the girls had often enough tried to teach her something a little more modern!) Or if even Amy Pasker would yodel out, as was her vulgar wont, through the open doorway of her room —"Anyone going to Morristown?" This question usually meant that she had several commissions for the unfortunate anyone who responded. Amy Pasker? Those were her footsteps now clapping down the corridor—short quick steps on high French heels. Louise sprang up and went swiftly over to the door. She flung it wide, and thrust her head out.

"Is that you, Amy?"

"Hello, Lou. Isn't it awfully quiet?"

"Uncanny."

"What are you doing?"

"I was going to write."

"I washed my hair. Full of soap. Going to Morristown to have it done over and get a wave. Want to come?"

"I suppose I might as well."

At the hair-dresser's, Amy satisfied with the improvements wrought upon her own locks of dead-leaf brown, stared critically at Lou's.

"Yours would be better bobbed and in soft curls. You

have the face for it—round you know. Mine is too—too chiseled."

"Oh, yes," chimed in the hair-dresser. "It 'ud be much better bobbed."

Lou drew back from them both. "I've often thought of it, of course, but—well, some other time." A certain vigorous-mouthed relative rose swiftly before her mind's eyes.

"Do it now, Louie," urged Amy. "You can have it bobbed, laundered, and curled, all for just a few—"

"Oh, that wasn't bothering me." Lou swung her purse round on its cord.

"It will look stunning. And you'll feel so much better—all the girls say so—so light in the head, you know. I wish my face were round. I'd have mine done in a minute." She ran two fingers over her straight carved profile from brow to chin. "But you'd look darling."

Lou, closing her mind's eyes now to the Medusa-like vision of Cousin Brenda, opened her purse and glanced at its contents.

"Oh, that's all right," murmured the hair-dresser. "You can charge it."

"It won't be necessary," said Lou.

"Good! Come on." Amy led her to the chair, and held her coat and hat. The hair-dresser took the shears in hand. Lou felt the cold click of them.

"Wait," she gasped. "My heart's queer. Don't do it yet." This was provokingly conventional behavior.

"Oh, go ahead," laughed Amy.

"All right. Go ahead." She did *not* shiver—Amy's later asseverations to the contrary notwithstanding. The question, being in Amy's opinion eminently worth debating, was destined to crop up with annoying frequency in the course of the remaining few months of their junior year.

When the process of bobbing and curling was completed, Louise gazed at an attractive vision of herself in

the mirror. The "bob" was extraordinarily becoming as Amy had prophesied it would be.

"Now all you need," the latter remarked, "is a little color. Yours is lost and gone forever, I guess. It used to be very good. But you're getting absolutely pallid. Of course, that can easily be remedied."

"Let's walk home," suggested Lou. She knew how her cheeks would glow, and how her eyes would sparkle after the exercise.

"On French heels?"

They paid their respective bills, hurried off to the confectioner's where each invested in a mocha cake and a box of choice caramels, then headed for and reached in due time to be saved from perishing by hunger, a cozy tea-room—open fire-place and all—where they treated themselves generously to a solid evening meal.

"We spent a lot—for Morristown," said Amy, looking thoroughly contented despite this reflection upon their financial excesses. "One doesn't notice it in New York; one expects it. But you certainly didn't throw your money away. Your hair is too cute for anything!"

They returned to the campus by trolley, and on their way through the main building stopped at the switchboard to inquire about the basket-ball score. Such news was customarily telephoned in from the scene of contest. The operator was glumness itself. "Our team lost," she said.

Amy drew down the corners of her thin-lipped mouth. "What's the matter with them anyway?" And Louise, in addition to a wretched heart-sinking over the ignominy of defeat for the college, suffered more than one sharp twinge of sympathy for Elizabeth. "She'll feel awful! She'll feel awful!"

She did evidently feel all that that superlatively convenient if misused adjective implies, when she came to Lou's room that night about a quarter past nine.

"Just got in," she said drearily; then, having taken a step or two forward, she stopped. "Lou!"

"Don't you like it?" Lou, laughing, tossed her head back so that the curls fell away from her face. When she held her head erect again, they fell into place prettily once more round her brow and against her radiant cheeks. She knew that she had color now.

"When did you do that?" Elizabeth sank into a restful chair, a weary game-worn, way-worn sub-forward glad to be back from an alien campus where cheers of honor had sounded not for her.

"I had it done in Morristown this afternoon."

"And curled?"

"Of course." Lou laughed again at the superfluous question, though she was puzzled at the accompanying expression on Elizabeth's face. "I went with Amy. We had dinner afterwards. And oh,—are you hungry? I have a mocha cake, and the most delicious caramels." She crossed to the table and opened the box.

"I'm not hungry. We had dinner, you know, with Jack." Elizabeth's hands rested listlessly on the arms of the chair; her eyes sought as refuge the rug near the dressing-table. "I'm not hungry."

"Tomorrow then." Louise closing the box, turned away unnecessarily. "How is Jack?"

"Never better." Elizabeth's tone was dead.

Something obviously was wrong. Louise jerked round. "Don't you like my hair?"

"Millions!" An admiring upward glance proved the sincerity of the ejaculation. "You look as cute as the dickens!" Her eyes instantly drooped again.

"Is there something bothering you?"

"Three things." Elizabeth smiled, this time without looking up.

"I know one. It wasn't your fault."

"I made two baskets." She spoke unboastfully, almost as if without interest in the subject.

"What are the other things?"

"Jack left us at Forty-second Street. He's on his way to Canada."

Louise leaned back against the table, her fingers playing with the lid of the cake-box.

"Will he be gone long?"

"Till June."

Lou lifted swift hands to fumble with the neck of her dress—an old one from last year and black, of course.

"Isn't that mean?" she half whispered.

"Dreadful. Mother feels awful." Elizabeth rose dejectedly. "June and then Cuba. Well, groaning about it doesn't help. I'm going to bed. I'm dead tired. Night, hon." She came over to Lou smilingly, put an arm round her, and quite surprisingly kissed her. "Your hair does look wonderful—really."

They walked just a few steps to the dressing-table together, there almost mechanically letting their clasped hands slip apart. Regarding the third reason for Elizabeth's despondency, Lou entirely forgot to inquire. Left alone, she stood for a while with downcast eyes facing the dressing-table and fingering thoughtfully the little string of pearls about her neck. Jack had not even sent her a "Goodby." She raised her eyes at length, and darting a companionably reckless smile at her reflection in the mirror, said aloud, though with the suspicion of a quiver upon her tightening lips,

"Who cares!"

Next, one must work. One ought always to work when trouble settles down upon one. Nor would creative work suffice as an anodyne. *Her Goal,* for all the healing power it might lend its author, was quite as well lying there in her desk drawer, under themes and notebooks and theater programs and old magazines. But there were Greek verb forms to learn, and in English literature there were dates to memorize. She had rather shirked these latter during her two years and a half at

college. And there was that complicated thing in English history to be straightened out—that thing called the Industrial Revolution, full of machinery and the names of unimportant people like inventors and so forth. Well, she would improve her mind and harden her heart. With both processes she doggedly busied herself even after "lights out"—yes, with her flash lamp, far on to midnight.

March continued to be capricious. One particularly bleak day, Louise sat in class watching through the sleet and snow which drove slantingly down past the window the six dark fir-trees in the meadow, their tops swaying spasmodically, their branches wildly tossing in the wind. This was the way with spring, she thought gloomily, as this was the way with life. Both were constantly disappointing. She glanced up at Father Carroll. What was he talking about? Why should he be so earnest about it? The girls did not half understand, as she knew absolutely. And yet he wanted them to understand. He explained to them over and over, and was saying now, "Well, take the stock syllogism—'All men are mortal—John is a man—' " Louise scribbled on her writing tablet, "John—John—John Stedman—Jack Stedman—Jack—Jack—" Elizabeth poked her arm and slipped her something, a letter, perhaps, for she had requested Elizabeth to investigate her mail-box. It was not a letter. It was a picture postal card from Canada bearing the neatly written question, "Lou, why don't you write to a fellow?"

Father Carroll had proceeded to a discussion of the Church. He uttered the word, "Church," with a certain loving, tender reverence as he might say, "Mother." He was a refined type, with a head such as artists love to represent in intaglios and anaglyphs, his hair iron-gray, his eyes deep-set, steady and straight-glancing because he knew truth. "The Church disapproves. That ought to be enough for us, her children. But if you wish to know

the reasons—" Louise, who had missed the transition from the mortality of man to the precept against mixed marriages, listened sensitively now to Father's forthright treatment of his topic, with the result that she was strongly inclined not to think so kindly of him as had always been her wont. Her harassed fancy was shortly diverted, however, by another Canadian postal card dropped from a swift hand to her note-book. This one was addressed to Elizabeth. "Send me some of those ink-pellets—won't you?" Under Jack's message Elizabeth had scrawled in pencil, "Brotherly affection." Father Carroll was quoting Saint Paul now. "Matrimony is a 'great sacrament.'" The firm ascetic looking hand struck the desk in accentuation of the adjective. "And since it is a 'great sacrament,' why should Catholics . . ." The question was lost upon Lou. A third postal card from Canada had reached her by some mysterious route. On this one Alicia's name appeared, and, besides, four heart-crushing sentences: "I heard from your father yesterday. Everything is O.K. He says the reservations were a little hard to get. But probably he has written all about it to you." Alicia had added, in her small Spencerian script for Lou's delectation, the poignant and connotative phrase, "Just think!"

"I'm starved!" Amy Pasker, at the end of the logic class, raised high her voice and her head, scanning the groups pressing out in the corridor. "Anyone want to go down for something to eat? Alicia?"

"In Lent?"

"*You* don't have to fast," remonstrated Amy. "Bet, don't you want to come down to the mission store for some mallowmars?"

"I'm not eating between meals."

"Lou, you come. You're not abstaining or anything." Amy hooked an arm through Lou's. "Your hair's getting out of curl. It's this beastly weather. You ought to wear a hat. I'll curl it for you this afternoon." She

tried to draw Lou along with her. "My, but I'm starved! You don't mind coming down. Do you?"

"I have some work to look over for the next period." Lou stood stock still.

"Pollywog!" Elizabeth waved a hand at her above a score of intervening heads. "Aleesh and I are going downstairs to the French Club to read up our drama notes. Want to come?"

"I—I'm going to the mission store with Amy for something to eat."

They went out hatless, but buttoned up in rain-coats, waded through the slush, and crossed the sodden road to the walk, down which Amy, being in hilarious spirits, elected to slide. Lou followed glumly.

In the mission unit shop situated at the end of the first corridor—or as the inelegant called it, the basement—of Santa Rita Hall, Fritzie, seated at the long old wooden table, bent her lovely blond head over an unlovely "copy-book" ledger. Above her, daylight at its dimmest found its way through two small windows, and from the ceiling swung a single electric bulb which spread through the long narrow room a glow pale and apologetic. For those who work for the Faith must suffer poverty, and fine appointments in the shop would have diminished the sum that went yearly to God's soldiers, the missionaries, in lands both far and near. Fritzie, a fervent member of the college unit, served in the unostentatious capacity of bookkeeper and bill-collector, the latter an invidious rôle. She also ordered stock.

"Enough candy," she murmured, glancing toward the shelves at her left. "Gummies, goody-mints, butter-scotch. . . . Most of the girls have given it up for Lent. Ruinous to trade! We need more crackers." She rose and surveyed the higher shelves where were displayed rows upon rows of tea-biscuits, soda-wafers, saltines, mallow-mars, chocolate-fingers, mint-wafers, and the other varie-

ties manufactured by the great biscuit company of America. "And peanuts." She crossed to the other side of the room and began meditatively to fill the little paraffine paper bags from the round tin can, one tiny measure to a bag with three or four extra peanuts added to each as a sort of after scruple. "Because it does seem a small bit for a nickel."

"It's open!" cried Amy jubilantly.

She and Lou ran down the long corridor and breathlessly entered the shop.

"We're starved!" The refrain had become a habit with Amy. "Mallowmars—" she helped herself to a box— "and some peanuts—" Fritzie handed her a bag. "What do you want, Lou?"

"I don't want anything."

"Aren't you funny? What did you come down for?" Amy stared incredulously.

"To oblige you, perhaps." The "perhaps" sheathed a mental reservation.

"Come on up to my room, then, and read drama notes."

"I want to talk to Fritzie." Lou walked over, and in proof of her intention to carry out her immediate wish, seated herself deliberately and comfortably on the table.

"Shaking me?"

"Shaking you."

Amy shrugged her shoulders. "I'm happy." She went out of the shop humming to herself and munching peanuts. When she was halfway down the corridor, she called back, "Meet you in a little while."

"All right." Lou's acquiescence was scarcely cordial, though she remarked in an undertone to Fritzie, "She has a tolerable disposition, anyway—hasn't she?"

Fritzie waved a gesture that enjoined silence, for she was counting pickle bottles.

"Fifteen," she finished.

"Fritzie, will you talk to me?"

"Certainly. What's the trouble?" Fritzie came over

smilingly, and sat up beside the forlorn one on the table. Lou loved Fritzie's clear pink cheeks and sea-blue eyes and general effect of coolness and comforting.

"Don't you ever, ever get depressed?"

"What's the matter?" Fritzie's head was bent low. She was trying to look into Lou's eyes, but Lou's eyes were cast down. "You and Bet had a—a difference?"

"No—that is—why, no, not at all!"

Fritzie sat erect and sketched imaginary rose-petals on the knee of her jade green frock. She could wait.

"It's Alicia." Lou mentioned the name somewhat shamefacedly, but added hastily, "Not that I dislike her—I like her as much as I ever did—but she irritates me. She's on my nerves."

Fritzie, continuing to sketch rose-petals, proffered in her cooling accents, "When people get on our nerves, isn't it usually our own fault?"

"Of course! I know that!" Lou's rejoinder was accompanied by a cross frown and an impatient kick of her dangling feet. "But that's not helpful! What am I to do about it? I can't help it—"

"Nonsense!" The psycho-analyst's low, amused laughter disposed of the patient's sophistry. "Did you ever try praying for her?"

"I don't hate her that much! I pray for my stepmother—"

"Well, pray for Alicia, and she'll evaporate—I mean as an antipathy."

"Funny to be praying for your antipathies." Louise gave a half chuckle at the idea. "Do you?"

Fritzie nodded. "I pray over everything."

"Is that why you're so—so calm and collected?" It was Lou's turn now to try to see into Fritzie's eyes. "You know I've often watched you in the chapel sitting there quietly before the Blessed Virgin's statue. What do you say?"

The delicate pink of Fritzie's cheek spread to her

brow and down to the low collar of her dress. "Oh, I don't say a great deal," she murmured smilingly. She seemed disconcerted, almost embarrassed, but the blush died away, and she went on bravely, "I just sit there and say, 'Mary, show thyself my mother.' You know my own mother died when I was a child, and—and I always rather depend on Our Lady."

"It's lovely!" Lou fingered the back of Fritzie's collar. "It's lovely!" She hesitated for a moment, then—"Would it—would it be all right for a non-Catholic to try it?"

"Why not?" Fritzie caught in her cool solid grasp the hot hand that stole over her shoulder. "Our Lord gave her to everyone."

"Do you know," breathed Louise, "I feel sort of better? I'll begin to-night. And I'll pray for Alicia, too."

Fritzie had slipped down from the table, and now Lou followed suit. "Does Bet know?"

A negative shake of the head from Bet's best friend.

"Candidly—I hope you won't mind my saying so—" said Fritzie, "isn't it rather a trifle to be depressed about?"

"Maybe." Lou walked over to the door and stood there, her back to Fritzie, moodily drawing pencil lines round the head of a nail which protruded from the wood.

"But praying over trifles is good," heartily asserted the spiritual adviser. "Probably you're unaware that you caused me a lot of disturbance once. I was almost crazy."

Louise swung round, her face brightening with interest. *She* was almost crazy now, she was convinced, for, of course, she had not confided the essence of her woe to Fritzie.

"It was about Billy. I knew Bet didn't care a scrap, but I thought you—" Here she halted, regarding the eager face before her. "You didn't really care for him?"

"Billy? I thought once in a while that I did, but I'm

quite sure now that I didn't." Her tone rang absolutely true.

Fritzie proceeded easily. "I didn't want to be mean. I'd read in some book—a story book, I think, that if you'd offer God something that was very dear to you, He'd—well, He'd either take it for your good, or He'd take it and then give it back to you. I was troubled to death! I felt so mean about you. I wanted to do what was right, but *you* know—" Yes, perfectly! Her eager listener nodded her head, but would not interrupt. "So one day after a tremendous—a tremendous struggle, I went to the chapel, and I said, 'God, I give You Billy.' I'd read it in a book—" She rather hastily reiterated the origin of her inspiration as if in fear of acquiring the credit or the discredit of high sanctity—"a story book—one of Enid Dinnis', I think."

Louise was drawing in her breath and staring painfully. "But that was too hard!" She stammered over the words. "That would be too hard!"

"Coming, Louie?" Amy's voice broke in upon them, stridently, from the end of corridor.

"It *was* hard—rather."

"Louie, are you coming?" Amy herself was coming rapidly in their direction.

"Charge these." Louise picked up a bag of peanuts, and ran to keep her unwelcome appointment. And as she ran, she said silently a little prayer, "God, I give You—I give—I give You—Alicia."

The end of the month brought windy days, with the earth a patchwork of white and brown, and pools of water freezing a dead gray in the hollows below the hills. Through the long weeks of Lent most of the pleasures of the world were forsworn by an edifying majority of the students, for Father Carroll had lucidly and emphatically explained to them on Ash Wednesday evening that theater-going and dancing and kindred di-

versions were incompatible with the spirit of the penitential season. "And surely we all love Our dear Lord Who suffered for us! We *all* love Him. I can take that much for granted." He was so earnest, so sincere, so truly himself a lover of that dear Lord, as he stood up there at the altar rail in cassock and thin lace surplice, his arms outstretched pleadingly, that their hearts must have been steel, indeed, not to have been touched. "I can take that much for granted."

Yes, that and more! Many, many resolutions were instantly made, and, if some were broken before the end of the holy season, well, the dear Lord regarded the good will, and next Lent they would be better. As for Louise, she crowned an heroic struggle against her ill emotions toward Alicia by inviting her home for Easter.

"Thank heaven!" exclaimed Cousin Brenda with bitter fervor on learning that the guest, an excessively "Latin Roman"—Spanish, in fact—was the daughter of the man with whom Jack Stedman was going to Cuba. And on Aunt Ellie's looking mildly bewildered, "Don't you understand?" she asked tartly. "He'll probably forget Louise."

"Poor child!" murmured Aunt Ellie and gazed sadly out the window.

"Ellie, you *are*—"

The excoriation, or anathema, or vituperation, or whatever it was to which these words were prelude, was cut short by the entrance of the two girls.

"On our way from shopping," beamed Alicia, "I brought Louisita into a Spanish church. I wanted her to see it. We stopped in at Saint Patrick's Cathedral also, and it is big and wonderful! yes, but I like my nice Spanish church best. Don't you, Lou?" She put an arm around her. "Oh, we are having such a charming holidays that I dislike to go back to college."

To Louise's immeasurable relief, however, they did go back, for confronted with both Cousin Brenda and

Alicia, she had found her spiritual wrestlings doubly hard. Her sacrifice she made one night in the chapel after May devotions. She liked May devotions, and, since her talk with Fritzie, she had come to feel very friendly with Our Lady. Aunt Ellie, moreover, had assured her that this sentiment of regard was permissible. "In our church they are even considering introducing the Angelus," she had confidentially told Louise. "The curate says it, but the rector has not quite agreed to making it a public prayer. Of course, Cousin Brenda is dreadfully opposed to it." So Lou prayed to the Blessed Virgin with a clean conscience, answered her Hail Mary's fervently—cheered and strengthened as each little bead of her cheap black rosary (purchased bashfully in the college store) slipped through her fingers—and sang heartily with the others the litany at evening services.

One night, however, just a month before Jack's sailing day—and as that day approached, she found it increasingly difficult to concentrate upon anything else—she sat in the chapel only half attending to Father Carroll's sermon on a subject with which, at another time, she might have been enraptured—Our Lady's love for souls.

"Souls—souls—" Lou looked up at Father Carroll without seeing him. He had become for her a shadow in a golden haze.

" 'The little souls that are so hard to find.' " She loved that line. It was somewhere in modern poetry.

" 'Mary seeks the little souls that are so hard to find.' " And it was not written by a Catholic. She knew that. It was curious that so many of the moderns used Catholic imagery. She smiled at the idea. Modern poetry was fun—free verse especially. She fashioned a line or two, then and there, resting her eyes and her spirit on the vaulted ceiling.

"Gold, white, and arches reaching high,
Lifting my soul——"

But blue! Why, oh, why had the ceiling just there over the sanctuary been tinted blue? She thought of "blue" for a long time—in itself the loveliest of colors, and, in a line of poetry, perfect. "Frail, blue wings." "With frail, blue wings—" The angels at the rear wall of the sanctuary—were they symbolical or merely decorative? The red of the wall was regrettable, but undoubtedly was intended to set off the delicate carving of the white marble altar. "Red for the lass." What was that poem? "Gray for the solemn priest—" With a shock she emerged from her reverie. Father Carroll was preaching! She must pay attention! "Souls hard to find—" Our Lady loves them. Father Carroll was not in gray; he was in a black cassock and thin lace surplice. "Gray for the solemn priest—" Oh, yes! "Red for the lass—" And the rest?

"Black for the silent boy
Dead in the grass."

The congregation was stirring. The sermon was over, and Benediction had begun. Louise knelt with the others, a little dazed, a little remorseful over her unheeding of time and place, and determined to check her mental wanderings, but determined, alas, with that half determination which, making difficult entrance into a fit of abstraction, far from conquering and expelling it joins it in a traitorous and demoralizing game of see-saw.

"Black for the silent boy
Dead in the grass."

"Dead in the grass—" in tall swampy grass in Cuba. He was brought home, and then there was the funeral. It was a long, long funeral. It left the house and moved slowly, slowly to the church, and there she walked down the aisle—a long, long aisle—with the Stedman family, to no one of whom she had disclosed her feelings. No, not to anyone of them! Not even to Elizabeth! All

during the requiem she knelt, her face hidden in her hands.

"Laudate Dominum, omnes gentes——"

The congregation was standing—the congregation in the college chapel. Familiar voices were singing the concluding psalm of Benediction. Louise stood up and made effort to contribute to the harmony of sweet sounds. In vain. Swift confusion had overwhelmed her, and she was blushing hotly, not only because of her wasting of the service time in futile dreaming but equally because such dreaming, recently become a habit with her, was all too clearly indicative of weakness of will. "I've got to stop it! I must!" The words at length formed themselves firmly on her lips. She waited in the last pew of the chapel after the others in patient procession had gone out. It was dim and quiet inside. Only up in the right transept a few of the sisters remained. "Black for the silent boy—" No! She shook her head vigorously. "I must stop! 'Black for the—' I *will!*"

She felt very, very calm. There was no "atmosphere" in the chapel now such as she had occasionally been aware of. "I'm nothing!" Realization of her "nothingness" entailed evidently no blighting melancholy; rather did it appear to bring with it a certain serenity which she had often of late desired. "I wish I might be emotionless like this forever!" She closed her eyes and kept them closed for a long time. She could not entirely account for her resolve, but she was still feeling very, very calm when she said her prayer, "Dear God, I give You Jack." She added, after an interval of amazingly lovely peace, "But please give him back—that is, if You want to." And this codicil only a Pharisee would pretend to interpret as a subtraction from the holocaust. As for Lou, she knew her prayer to be a good prayer, with the ring of true spirituality in it; and with this happy con-

viction, she went out and joined Elizabeth who was waiting for her, seated on the chapel steps.

"Just think, Lou! Jack sails a month from to-day!"

"And the day afterwards will be commencement. Do you ever stop to consider all we have to do before then?"

The "all" included Mission Day, the third Saturday in May, with a play in which Elizabeth appeared in the leading rôle, a missionary sister in China.

"She looked terribly sweet, I must admit," said Amy Pasker. She and Lou had been obliged to hurry over to Santa Rita Hall immediately after the play, and were there now standing behind one of the booths in the reception room which, for the nonce, was transformed with lanterns and festoons of purple wisteria into a Japanese bazaar beautiful to behold. "Get the old chap over at the candy table. Wish he'd come here! But her hair is her chief charm. I like brown." She patted her own locks. "Mine hasn't the lovely lights that Bet's has, and isn't naturally wavy. Of course, her hair *had* to be covered for the part. I suppose she'll go to dramatic school after she finishes—"

"Sometimes I hate to think of it," put in Louise. "I hate to think of her face all done in stage make-up, and her acting for a lot of strange people who don't care anything about her. And yet—"

"Look what I bought." Alicia tripped up to them, exhibiting a kimono of soft iridescent silk. "And Papa's going to treat us—many of us—you, Lou, and Amy—and many others, afterwards, in the tea-room. Don't forget!" She sank back into the crowd, and was lost to view.

"Do you think Alicia will be a sister?"

Ingratiating as Amy's question was, Lou had no opportunity to answer it. Two ladies standing before the booth were negotiating for a luncheon set—worth twenty dollars, Amy assured them, but marked down to ten.

Even if Alicia did become a sister, Lou reflected, the happy consummation would be far from settling her own difficulties, for there still remained the impediment of Bet's prayers regarding Jack's vocation to the priesthood. Well, her own prayer stood. She had not retracted it.

"Change from twenty dollars." Amy thrust a bill at her co-saleswoman who fumbled awkwardly with the loose money in the round red bon-bon box. "There it is." Amy's nimble fingers were passing the crisp clean ten dollars to the purchaser of the luncheon set. "They have awfully good home-made cakes at the other end of the room," she remarked with enthusiasm as the lady turned to go. "I like to think over what the girls will be. I like to study them." Amy deftly "roughed" a lock of her hair, and nodded to someone in the crowd.

"I do, too," murmured Lou, and added in a moment of indiscretion, "I'm trying to write a story about them."

"No!" Amy grasped her by both arms. "Really? Let me read it. Won't you?"

"Oh, I couldn't." Lou, laughing self-consciously, gently endeavored to wrest herself from Amy's iron hold.

"Please! You ought to, you know. You ought to let someone read it. You ought to get criticism."

"Well, maybe."

Her story did need criticism—yes, just that. Some day, perhaps, she would let Amy read it, for Amy would be an impartial judge. Fritzie and Bet would be too kind. Here was Bet approaching now.

"We're nearly up to a thousand dollars already." Her face was flushed with excitement as she made the announcement.

"Never!" Her co-workers for the home and foreign missions leaned over the table, uttering the word in duet.

"Isn't it great?" She moved on quickly, waving back at them a handful of green bills. She had a novelty booth across the room near the door.

Three giggling freshmen came up, and with the gaucherie of their kind, stood exchanging in *sotto voce* jests for their own entertainment, and examining the wares on the table.

"Only five dollars—these beautiful ebony candlesticks, and red candles—your class colors. Take them home to your mother." Thus Amy in sales-woman accents, with a large and munificent gesture in the direction of the commodities she had so unnecessarily described.

The freshmen giggled a bit more.

"My mother would think I was crazy." One of them picked up a little silk sewing bag of peacock blue. "This would be nice for my sister. How much?"

"Two dollars."

The freshman gently dropped the bag. Her companions laughingly chaffed her.

"I'll give it to you for one."

The freshman bought it, and the three passed on, heads together, exclaiming rapturously over the bargain.

"Don't forget their type." Amy, turning to Lou, indicated the departing group with a jerk of her head. "Babes in the wood. Gosh, I'd like to be able to write a story! Has Bet read it?"

"No."

"Why not?"

For answer, Louise shrugged her shoulders and smiled extensively.

"She in it?" Amy had a sledge-hammer way with her.

Unsmilingly Lou answered in the affirmative, resenting the more this extraordinary evidence of acute perception in Amy because of the latter's general reputation for the opposite quality. Welcome, thrice welcome, indeed, was the eager-eyed batch of customers that now drew near, welcome they and the others and others who from that moment until six o'clock absorbed the attention of the two booth-keepers. At six they went down to the tea-room, a gold and green dream saved, as it were,

from sheer faeriness, by the swift moving about of athletic sophomores who steered this way and that among the crowded tables, and bore aloft with immense determination and calculating brow, each one her lacquer tray precariously piled with cups of coffee, sandwiches, ices, salads, and other confections, varied and delicious and credited duly to the domestic science department.

"Papa, sit here."

Little Sigñor Remon, stocky and solid, his brown face wrinkled like dry tobacco leaf, his small brown eyes beaming appreciatively—for he was being permitted to "treat"—his strong white teeth showing a fixed smile under his black moustache—obeyed his daughter's injunction. He was "treating" twenty of these young ladies. It was a pleasure. They were his daughter's friends. She loved them all. They loved her. Her name was on the lips of all of them. Perhaps he would allow her to come back to the school next year. It was very nice. He ate his sandwich in silence, but looking about in placid enjoyment of the youthful company. There was Jack's sister. Jack was a smart boy. These Americans were. He would help Jack, and Jack would be useful to him. And there was that quiet child-like young girl—that Louise whom his daughter admired so much. "I shall invite her to Cuba sometime, Papa." "Yes, yes," he had assented. "Of course." He acquiesced in all his Alicia's plans—except when she forgot that money was not on the street to pick up. She was very nice, his daughter. She was talking now.

"You will all write me a boat-letter. Won't you?"

Chorus: "Yes, Alicia."

That was an idea! A boat-letter! Lou turned the idea swiftly over in her mind, losing all appetite for her pineapple salad.

"Will you write me one, Louisita?" Alicia made pleading eyes at her across the table.

"Surely."

Louise had already begun to compose her boat-letter. Mentally she had written the salutation and the opening sentence: "Dear Jack, I just want to remind you that we are all here in the old U. S. A."—a flat composition, it is true, but extremely subtle in its employment of the first person plural, she thought—"and that we do not intend to forget you—"

"Is she not kind, Papa?"

The boat-letter was written over and over in the weeks intervening between Mission Day and the eve of Jack's sailing. The final draught was simple and brief, leaving volumes to be read between the circumspectly fashioned lines.

DEAR JACK,

I am enclosing some snapshots of us all taken at your house, you remember, that day in my sophomore year when you came over to Anne's with us and then to the train. I have lots of snapshots of old times that I enjoy looking at, and so I thought you, being away from home, might like to look at these occasionally. I hope you will be very successful and very happy in Cuba. I should like to hear how you are getting along.

Always sincerely,

LOUISE.

She wrote it out carefully at night, and enclosed the pictures—her treasures. At least they would remind him, though, since in all of them she appeared as only one of a group, he could not possibly deem this gift forward. She had somewhat tremulously incribed his name upon the envelope, and had placed it face downwards upon the table, when Amy sauntered in, ready for an unseasonable chat. Lou and Fritzie were to go down to Hoboken in the morning on the nine-thirty-four to say farewell to the voyagers. Bet had left college that afternoon for home to have a visit with her brother. Alicia had spent the week shopping in New York.

"Give Aleesh my love," Amy requested. "I thought

I might trip down myself to see her off, but I have a special exam tomorrow morning. English condition. Beastly! Imagine! The day before commencement!"

At precisely twenty minutes past nine in the morning Lou had bestowed the final pat upon the curled ends of her bobbed hair, had drawn over it, very carefully, her new and very smart little hat of dull tan, and was contemplating an extra ceremonial dab of powder on her nice unobtrusively child-like nose, when her call-bell rang. She swiftly snatched up a handkerchief, her gloves, and her purse. "No time to come back." She hurried downstairs.

"Telephone for you." Mitzie Kumf thrust her head out of the office.

Louise hurried in. Elizabeth at the other end of the wire told her frantically not to delay on any account. The steamer was leaving an hour earlier than they had anticipated. "We all forgot about daylight saving," she said.

"I'm going for the nine thirty-four now. Goodby."

Fritzie was waiting for her in the foyer, and together they dashed out and over toward the station. At the tennis court, Lou stopped suddenly.

"I forgot something. I've got to go back."

"Oh, Lou!" There was a mild note of protest in Fritzie's even voice.

"I've got to."

She ran back and up to her room. Her letter was there on the table.

Fritzie continued on her way to the station, and from the platform saw the nine-thirty-four pull out just as Lou, breathless and white from running, reached the college gate.

"The next is ten-thirty—a local." Fritzie admirably maintained her accustomed poise, the difficulty of con-

trolling a justifiable impulsion to reproach lessening easily as Lou came slowly across the tracks and stood facing her, still colorless and obviously wrought up to a high pitch of emotion over her own wretched blundering.

"We'll miss them." She made vain effort to appear otherwise than utterly distressed.

They went over and sat on a bench outside the station door, and after a recuperative few minutes of silence, initiated a conversation upon irrelevant subjects which they bravely continued until the ten-thirty wound leisurely round the bend from Morristown.

"Madison—Chatham—Summit—Maplewood—" The conductor dragged out the heart-appalling list.

"We may make it." Fritzie generously simulating content, settled herself on the aisle side in the train, took out her time-table, and prepared to calculate.

But Lou, staring out through the window and scarcely moving her lips, kept repeating and repeating a prayer which for at least the past fortnight had become almost as habitual to her as breathing.

"If You want to Lord! If You want to!"

Out in the river they saw it, the big beautiful steamer, slowly swinging round, its prow turning bayward. They had seen it from the street, and had run a whole block to the entrance of the pier. Now they ran down to the end of the pier and joined the crowd there, to wave and wave at the indistinguishable figures of the passengers lined along the deck railings far off there in mid-stream. Like a thing passing out of life into eternity, the vessel drew away from them, moving with a weird swiftness down the river that opens into the sea, and leaving them, the watchers, half-gasping and helpless and hopeless. Gradually the crowd of watchers thinned. Groups of three or four or five detached themselves from the rest reluctantly and, in many instances, with the sadness of the centuries upon their countenances that marks truly

the brotherhood of the races. Men walked rapidly away, chins held high, proudly resentful of the world's silly fancy that tears could well up in their eyes! Women, some of them unabashedly weeping, others repressing their grief with tightening mouths or frowning brows, forgot their perennial duty to an exacting society of looking always at their best. Little children scampered about irrelevantly, or wailed aloud that they were hungry and wanted to go home. A tawdry young creature in a rusty hat of black felt and a flagrant orange suit of coarse linen, stood next to Louise, enthralled, even as she, by the sight of the departing vessel which had become a mere splotch of white mingled with other river and ocean craft in the distance.

"Don't I wish I was going though!" She flashed a comradely glance at Louise who, in her turn, smiled back as kindly as she could. She felt sorry for the girl. She felt sorry for everyone—for the whimpering children, for the red-eyed women, and for the men stalking so indignantly away.

"Come." Fritzie pulled her gently by the sleeve.

The air of the city that mid-day in June, though moderately cool, had a quality curiously empty and lifeless.

"It's strange that we haven't seen any of the Stedmans. Bet would look for us." Fritzie was glancing hither and thither as they retraced their steps over the long pier. Outside, halfway down the street, they caught a glimpse of Elizabeth and her father entering a taxi-cab.

That night, or rather early that evening, shortly after their arrival at college from the city, she called them again on the telephone. Her mother, she said, had been extremely distressed over Jack's going, and, to add to her sufferings, had twisted her ankle in hurrying down from the pier. "We had to take a taxi right home. What time did you get to the wharf?" "Too late," replied Fritzie, and went on, in a noble and successful effort at forestalling disconcerting questions, "We'll write to

Alicia and explain." Elizabeth told them that she would not be back for commencement exercises, having already secured from the college authorities, by telephone, permission for absence. "And, Lou, please come over on your way home. Alicia felt awfully bad at not seeing you, and Jack, too."

"We can write and explain everything to Alicia," repeated Fritzie as they walked slowly out from the office into the foyer.

They stood opposite each other there at the foot of the staircase. They had been under a strain all day, Fritzie because she knew their losing the train was Lou's fault, and Lou because . . .

"Oh, Fritzie!" she suddenly whispered in anguish, and an arm was impulsively thrown round Fritzie's neck, and a face was hiding itself against Fritzie's capable shoulder.

"It's all right, old dear," said Fritzie with supreme misunderstanding, the while her firm hands comfortingly grasped the sufferer's elbows. "It's all right. You couldn't help it, and we can explain to Alicia."

The face was lifted in a few seconds, flushed and embarrassed, but the eyelids were lowered over eyes that were unaccustomed to revealing anything other than the truth.

"I must finish packing." Lou turned to go upstairs. "I'd like to leave early after commencement tomorrow."

"Same here," said Fritzie—"on the four twenty-eight or the five ten."

CHAPTER XI

CONFERENCES AND COMMUNICATIONS

VACATION took Louise and her two home people West. The object of the trip, as predetermined in Cousin Brenda's mind, was to place between her impressionable young relative and the Stedmans those glorious miles and miles and miles of country—those cities, those lofty mountains, those deep rivers, those canyons, prairies, and desert plains—which indisputably separate the Atlantic from the Pacific Ocean. The outlook to Louise herself had offered promise of diversion from a routine of torturing fancies. With the self opposed to the scheme—for double moods were hers too painfully often now—she had argued that new scenes, new people would help her to forget—and she wanted to forget, maybe. But to frustrate her own vague half wishes and Cousin Brenda's carefully meditated design, letters came regularly from the East. Especially at the beginning of August in one batch came a long funny letter from Bet, a longer one from Alicia, and a note from Jack. Jack told her that he was "making good," "working hard," and that he understood perfectly about her failure to reach the boat on time in June. This was his answer to a tardily dispatched note of explanation from her. Bet wrote that Fritzie was at the bungalow, that Billy was a constant visitor, that Bob and Anne (Thank heaven!) had a tiny place of their own up on the beach, and that everything was golden except for her (Lou's) absence and Jack's. Alicia wrote of the weather

in Cuba, of her own inactivity and consequent increase in weight, of Jack's thinness and "awful" looks. He was "exceedingly engaged," she said, and like all Americans was money mad. It was disappointing, really. It was tiresome to listen to him and her father "forever conversing business." Also Jack was "perenally" smoking. He was, Alicia maintained, "a real cigarette fiend." "In a week, undoubtedly, when you receive this letter, he will advance into the interior of the country. It is very hot there. He is silly to go, but whatever is there will secure him more money." Louise paid only slight attention to the Esperanto in which her "sincerely loving Alicia" floundered about at the end of this missive. Jack's pursuit of worldly wealth had suggested more than once recently a possibility of purpose not to be disregarded, and Cousin Brenda, Louise had for many a day been prone to think, could without unnecessary effort furnish a clue to this part of the problem. But though she could, it was absurd to entertain the hope that she would. There remained, of course, Aunt Ellie from whom Louise was convinced she could elicit information of value if only they might be permitted a few secure minutes alone. For this opportunity she watched, and it came one afternoon when the two, aunt and niece, happened to be seated on some rocks at the edge of a picturesque stream in a sufficiently secluded corner of one of the parks in Duluth, Minnesota, and when Cousin Brenda happened to be safely away at the hair-dresser's in town.

"Will the estate be settled soon?"

Aunt Ellie mildly expressed a hope that it *would* be settled *very* soon.

"What did Jack Stedman have to do with it?"

"Nothing, dear, that I am aware of. See the reflection of the trees in the water over there—just below the hill! Exquisite! Had you noticed it?"

"Then why did Cousin Brenda send for him?"

"Oh, yes—just so!" Aunt Ellie showed signs of im-

pending discomposure. "Very true. She did send for him."

"It wasn't about the estate—I mean all she said to him wasn't about the estate." Lou tried her luck bravely, and, in token of her expectation of friendly alliance, played with the pleated organdie ruffle on the dainty and dignified elbow sleeve of Aunt Ellie's light summer dress.

"Dearie, you'll have all the pleats out if you continue."

"Was it?" Lou bent over and fixed her gentle victim with a penetrating gaze. Aunt Ellie returned the look helplessly as if hypnotized.

"No—very true," she feebly responded.

"What did she talk to him about?" pursued Lou, tincture of iron now in her voice.

"About the estate—certainly about the estate," murmured Aunt Ellie clasping her hands upon her knees, and with will fluttering this way and that, gazing unhappily across the stream which rippled calmly past over wide flat rocks of gray and brown.

"And what else? Please, Aunt Ellie!" Louise clasped her own hands and gazed also at the moving waters. "You know," she added on a little forlorn half-whisper, "I have no mother."

Before this master-stroke Aunt Ellie quite gave way.

"She did speak of something else. I advised her not to, but she did." A hand was placed tremulously on Lou's. "It was bad form if nothing else, and I told her so, to expatiate so unnecessarily—to rub it in—if you will pardon the expression, dear—to rub it in to Mr. Stedman about—about what your father had left you."

"Oh, no! She didn't really! But why? Why?" Louise was tightly clutching Aunt Ellie's hand.

"Darling, that's just what I said. The implication was unwarranted. Dearie, you're hurting my finger."

"What do you mean? Implication? What do you

mean? Could she have meant . . . Do you think he could have thought she meant . . ."

"He was very manly about it—quite reserved and cool —distant, I should say."

"It will be hard to forgive her for this!"

"He said he was not aware that he had given anyone the impression that he was interested in anyone's—in anyone's money—" Aunt Ellie coughed in embarrassment over the brash word—"or fortune—or—I don't recall his precise expressions—"

"It will be hard to forgive her for this!" vehemently repeated Louise, and rising impetuously, she took a step forward toward the edge of the water. "What must he think of me?" She stood with tense hands covering her eyes.

Aunt Ellie came and stood beside her, and closed kindly arms round her, murmuring in incoherent phraseology her regret at paining Lou by the sorry fact revealed, and imploring a merciful judgment for the well-intentioned perpetrator of what Lou in response cried out to be "outrageous underhand stuff" and "detestable foul play." A climax of tears threatened the scene, but Aunt Ellie forestalled them by drawing the flushed face toward her and saying decisively.

"Never mind! I'll fix it! It will be all right! I give you my word, dearie, it will be all right!"

"How can it be now?" half sobbed Louise.

"It will!"

"Do you mean—do you mean that you'll help me?"

"I will. I have no plan, but trust me. We'll pray over it, and be patient for a while."

"Really?"

"Really! Really!"

"I need—need someone."

"You have me, my darling."

They might have sat there near the water-side to

discuss a plan of campaign had not the time of day indicated the advisability of returning to their hotel to meet the villainess in their little drama, for whom, notwithstanding her villainy, they retained an affection deep and sincere. One thing that they did resolve upon, however, and that was to avoid any allusion to the troubling circumstances in her presence. And neither on that afternoon nor during the subsequent weeks of their journeying toward the coast, nor during the five exhausting days of their homeward trip, did they give her even slight reason to suspect that they were in conspiracy against her. Being tender-hearted conspirators, withal, they actually regretted the necessity of holding the secret from her.

"I feel sorry for her when she finds out," remarked Aunt Ellie.

"Don't let your sorrow get the better of you," exhorted Louise laughingly, yet immensely in earnest. "Remember, when I'm back at college and you're alone here in the apartment with her, you're not to grow confidential."

"I'll remember," said Aunt Ellie.

"Sometimes I think Alicia doesn't care a straw." Tangents in their conversations on the topic had become quite a matter of course.

"I could go call on Mrs. Stedman—"

"Aunt Ellie! I told you Bet was praying that he'd be a priest!"

"Then for a while," said Aunt Ellie, repeating the counsel for the hundredth time, "we'd just better pray, too, for light."

College opened early, the twenty-first of September. On the platform at Convent, Louise and Elizabeth flew into each other's arms. They had unknowingly come up in the train together.

"You look wonderful, Pollywog!"

"But you! You're thin!"

"Style," explained Bet, bending over to recover the suitcase which she had dropped on sighting Lou.

They managed, with some maneuvering, after saluting a hurly-burly of friends and classmates, to disengage themselves from the throng, and, having waited a space, to walk over quietly together under the arched maple trees.

"And we're seniors!" To her very natural and thrilled exclamation Lou was disappointed at receiving no response. "Aren't you all wrought up over it?"

"Nary a bit. But I'm really going to be dignified. I've got to."

"I hate dignified seniors," remarked Lou with feeling.

"Don't hate me, precious," laughed Bet lending a hand to Lou's luggage in sign of the uninjurability of their friendship.

"I don't want you to change." Lou spoke in a kind of joking petulancy. "Life gets all twisted up, but you must always be you."

"Yes?"

"I mean it! If you change, the world changes—for me."

"I'm not permitted to grow up?"

"I wish you wouldn't," sighed Lou.

Very naturally their steps led them into the chapel. Here was the Heart of the college. Louise knelt with bowed head and prayed her accustomed prayer—"Yes, I gave him to You, Lord, but please give him back to me. Please, please—if You want to."

Relaxing the tension of her own petitions, she raised her head and turned to observe her companion a few paces off in the pew. Elizabeth's hands were tightly clasped, and there was an expression of pain about her eyes as she gazed fixedly at the tabernacle door. She did not seem to be praying—her lips were motionless—but rather she seemed to Louise to be arguing, telepathically, so to speak, with God.

"She *has* grown up," thought Louise ruefully, "and she's taking the worries of the whole family on herself—though really I don't blame her for worrying about Jack."

Life at college, after the first trying days of adjustment, fell as usual into its normal way. Last year's juniors—unpromising as they had been in the popular opinion—proceeded as seniors during the opening weeks of the new term, calmly, deliberately, to appropriate to themselves the institution *in toto,* as if from all eternity it had been designed especially for them and no other. Their air of possession, their self-confidence, their consciousness of the vast knowledge and profound wisdom accruing to them in their experience of some score of years on this planet of the earth, inspired in the underclassmen, yes, even in the members of the faculty, sentiments oscillating between awe and almost uncontrollable irritation. Against this latter mood, in self-defense, the seniors welded themselves hour by hour into a united class until the more out-spoken of the juniors accused them at length of a deficiency in college spirit. The seniors alleviated the sting of this public reproach by gloating in secret conclave over their rapidly augmenting treasury from which, at the end of the year, they would present to *Alma Mater* a gift of money unequaled among class gifts in the collegiate annals. This objective lent them courage in the face of obloquy, and the sense of responsibility arising from weighty financial undertakings—sales of food on the campus, concerts, plays in the auditorium—almost palpably day by day developed in the individual members of the class—with, of course, some negligible exceptions—a dignity admirable to behold—more especially on formal occasions.

Elizabeth's dignity—for she was not among the exceptions—seemed pledged to permanency until one afternoon in late October when she and Fritzie and Louise were gathered in her room talking about nothing in general and criticizing the college in particular. They had

reached the stage of unfavoring comment upon the disciplinary methods of the institution to which they were, all three, heart and soul devoted, when Amy dropped in.

"I thought you'd be here." She held a sheaf of manuscript, the first glimpse of which evoked upon Lou's countenance a wild look of dismay. "I wanted to talk to you about your novel."

"Her novel?" Fritzie sat suddenly erect in her low-cushioned chair.

"Her novel?" Bet darted a hostile glance at the intruder, then turning to Lou who sat in speechless misery on the side of the bed, asked in a tone of assumed detachment, "Did you let *Amy* read your novel?"

"I wanted a criticism—" a weak defense— "She said she'd like to give me a criticism."

"Oh!" The interjection was quiet, expressive, final. Bet, wheeling about to face her dresser, began to unearth from its top drawer, pencils, ribbons, hair-pins, and sundry other articles of cognate value. She tossed a piece of used green sealing-wax upon the magazine Fritzie had opened in sign of indifference to Amy's unwarranted prerogative. "A souvenir of this remarkable occasion. I'm on the verge of cleaning house."

"I never use any but violet when I do use any." Fritzie carefully dropped the gift into the waste-basket beside her.

"It isn't realistic enough, I'm afraid." Amy had seated herself upon a stiffbacked chair opposite Lou. The latter had pulled herself up in a heap at the foot of the bed, her arms encircling two sofa-cushions as a drowning person might cling to the nearest thing resembling a life-saver. Her face was quite drawn in anticipated suffering of the ordeal which she had, half reluctantly it is true, invited. "It is too selective, I should say." Amy dwelt lingeringly upon the adjective, relishing the sound and meaning of it. "It does not tell enough."

"Couldn't you postpone this conference?" Bet asked

the question without turning when, in the mirror, she had caught sight of Lou's woe-stricken eyes.

"No time like the present."

"Then here's something to help you." Elizabeth threw backward over her head an aged ink-eraser which gently struck Amy on the nape of the neck and fell to the floor.

"The characters are all too good," pursued the critic. "They pray a whole lot more than college girls do—"

"I don't think so," interposed the author in rude and aggressive manner.

"Well, you're wrong," asserted Amy bristling, "and the book won't sell if you make people pray so much."

"I don't care," muttered the author surlily. "They *do* pray. I know it."

"Now, Lou, be sensible. Take me, for example—"

"You're not the heroine." It was rather cuttingly said.

"Don't you suppose I recognize the heroine?" returned Amy in acid tones. "Though you have idealized her extravagantly! Extravagantly!"

"*You* think so!" exclaimed Lou with tears in her eyes.

Fritzie stirred uncomfortably, but kept her gaze upon the pages of her magazine.

"Here, Louie," Elizabeth swung round, and tossed over to her from the conglomerate in the top-drawer, a little shabby brass pen knife. It landed on the bed, and lay there unnoticed.

"A knife breaks friendship," observed Amy.

"Fiddle!" sniffed Elizabeth. Nevertheless the color crept up behind her ears as, turning, she bent once more over the untidy top-drawer.

Amy having casually remarked that if Lou presented Bet with a penny in exchange for the knife the durability of their friendship would not be endangered, reverted firmly to the business on hand.

"As I was saying, the story doesn't seem true. There isn't a swear word in it. In all college stories—"

"Our crowd doesn't," interrupted Lou doggedly. "I'm not going to misrepresent them."

"Why, Louie Maxon! I heard Bet myself in the tea-room the other day—"

"Oh, don't be tiresome, Amy," exhorted the accused one in dry testy accents. "A person who steps into a cup of hot coffee can't be expected to—"

"It was on the floor. Mitzie Kumf left it there." Louise hastily introduced these details in the conviction apparently of their sufficiency to exonerate a saint from the imputed sin.

"And it was boiling hot," Elizabeth muttered in morose reflection upon the circumstances, "and it splashed over my brand new silk stocking and my perfectly new suede shoe."

"Really hot?" put in Fritzie irrelevantly and on a high note of astonishment. "I've never had a really hot cup of coffee in the tea-room—"

"Hot or cold," affirmed Amy incisively, "what Bet said would lend local color to the novel—would make it seem more real. As a college novel, it's perfectly flat. Why, there isn't even the whiff of a cigarette in it!"

"What, ho!" Elizabeth had fished a prize from the dresser-drawer at last. It was a prize distinctly apropos of their immediate contention—a small red box with a white label. "Jack's," she explained succinctly. "I took them from him the day he left for Cuba. I put them in the pocket of my spring suit, and they were still there when I came back to college. Jack was smoking too much. But," she added sighing over the exhausting problem of brothers, "I imagine he had dozens of boxes in his trunk."

Louise was absorbed. Amy wore an incredulous smile. Fritzie looked up steadily at the speaker. "You'd better dispose of them in a hurry. It means suspension to have them on the premises." Having proffered the gratuitous

advice and information, she calmly resumed the reading of her magazine.

"It's Mother's fault that they're here. I wanted a new suit, and so I refused to have my spring one cleaned. She wanted me to get a new fur coat. I didn't *want* a fur coat—" She made this last statement as one bitterly aggrieved, and raising the lid of the little red box, gazed affectionately at the five cigarettes therein. "But don't I wish I could get a whiff of Jack's cigarettes now!" She lifted one lightly and held it between her fingers, just touching it to her lips.

The door opened without a warning knock. On the threshold stood a freshman, overgrown, awkward, and apparently paralyzed by the sight before her, for she continued to stare round-eyed as Bet, still with the cigarette poised high, turned inquiringly to her.

"You're looking for someone?"

"I—I guess I'm in the wrong room."

"Perhaps," returned Elizabeth with a smile of dubious benevolence.

The freshman backed out and closed the door.

"A nice mannerly girl," remarked Elizabeth endeavoring to conceal a certain discomfiture aroused in her by the incident.

Amy on her part delivered an oration of some two or three minutes on the lack of refinement characteristic of the freshman class. "Well bred?" she concluded. "Some of them never heard the word!" It was a favorite one with her.

Fritzie, unimpressed evidently, indulged once more in an irrelevancy. "Bet, I advise you to dispose of those cigarettes as soon as possible."

"Without even a whiff of one," said Amy easily resuming her rôle of critic, "the story is namby-pamby."

This obnoxious description of Lou's novel was more than Elizabeth could endure. Besides, the ruffling of her temper and nerves by the ill-timed entrance of that mem-

ber of the student body who was obviously its prize blunderer, evidently needed instant sublimation of some sort. Amy was the victim, though even those who entertained no partiality for her type—and they were some few—would admit that she was undeserving of the asperity with which Elizabeth now addressed her.

"What do you know about writing anyway? You're not qualified to criticize. All you ever read outside of class work are sloppy magazines."

"Sloppy!" The critic rose in wrath tremendous. "You'd do well to select your language a little more carefully, Elizabeth Stedman!"

"Sloppiness by any other name would still be sloppiness," retorted the defender of *Her Goal.*

"Be as well bred as you can!" said Amy tossing the manuscript onto the bed where Louise tenderly gathered together the scattered pages.

"I'm being realistic. Don't you like it?" This speech, Fritzie told Elizabeth later, was decidedly superfluous—in fact, "catty."

For answer to it, at any rate, Amy deigned not to draw upon the resources of her own caustic vocabulary, but irate as the most irate of critics can be under criticism, she stalked fiercely—having first tripped over the rug—out into the safe purlieus of the corridor.

The next morning, however, she and Elizabeth walked up the hill together to class, and two days later the four went on a long field trip with Geology 2. In the evening when they returned, they were informed by a notice on the bulletin that at eight o'clock an important meeting would be held in the reception room for all students resident in Santa Rita Hall. Elizabeth wandered in early to the place of assembly, and having secured a deep and high-backed leather-cushioned chair in a remote corner, drowsed through a sermon from Sister Angela relative to some discovered breach of an important rule of the

institution. Smoking? Yes, smoking. Someone had been smoking in that very building. The someone must report herself, or . . . Elizabeth did not hear the rest, but roused herself at the conclusion of the lecture and walked out sleepily with the crowd. She called to Lou that she was going to bed early. The afternoon's tour of the country-side had been exhausting.

She went to bed, thanking her lucky stars for her present status as a senior. The days of foolish fun derived from a troublesome effort to shatter college regulations were for her fortunately passed. In regard to this affair so provocative of Sister Angela's indignation—well, probably some freshman had been silly. Freshmen were like that. They just ached to write home to their friends about "escapades." As for her, she had never smoked since that occasion in the long ago of her childhood when she had indulged in a relic, the butt-end of Father's cigar, for the ostensible purpose of ridding Mother's ferns of imaginary insects. Mother had found her stretched out under the ferns, had lifted her up, and led her staggering to bed, and had called the doctor. He had looked at her, grunted, and said gruffly, "Let her lie there. She'll be all right," and had taken his departure. She had seemed to herself then to be drifting about helplessly and nauseatingly upon multitudinous seas incarnadine, and multitudinous seas lead-blue, and multitudinous seas of dirty gray, and multitudinous seas a sickening green. The colors writhingly changed like monsters in a nightmare until, after what appeared a whole lifetime to her, she began to be aware that she was slowly drifting back to sane human existence. She had survived, of course, and the story had survived in the family annals. She adverted smilingly to it now as her head sank peacefully upon her pillow, and once more in reflection upon the exaggerated posturing and general silliness of freshmen, murmured before she fell asleep,

"Thank goodness, I'm a senior!"

It was with this very fact, however, that Sister Angela reproached her the next day when, at her summoning, Elizabeth stood before her in the office.

"I certainly expected a senior to report promptly."

"Report what, Sister?"

"Have you been smoking?"

"Not for about ten years," she replied chummily. "It was dreadful!"

"Elizabeth, are you sure?"

"Positive—unless I've been doing it unconsciously."

"Possibly," said Sister Angela with an upward jerk of her head that sent her glasses catapulting down upon the office desk. "But," she added, a slight stiffness in her intonation, "the mother of one of our freshmen wrote that her daughter could say so about you."

"She did? Did she?" The culprit stood there quite befuddled, staring with straining eyes at the representative of authority.

"Her daughter witnessed it," continued Sister Angela severely. "Her mother wrote so to the president."

"Me? Me, Sister?"

"Your name was mentioned. You were described."

"Wait." Elizabeth drew a hand across her brow as if memory were there located and gave promise of awakening. "Wait, Sister. I know. I know now. I had completely forgotten." She laughed in relief. "The thing's funny in a way. I'll tell you all about it." And sitting on a chair beside the desk, her hands thrust into the coat pockets of her suit of dark blue—*the* suit—she explained. "So you see it was Mother's fault. I didn't *want* a fur coat! What do I want a new fur coat for? Besides if I got one, Margy would have to wait till next year for hers. I wanted a new suit. I wouldn't even have this one cleaned and pressed. Poor Mother was provoked, too. Dear me, I shouldn't have provoked

her!" And to Sister Angela's astonishment and Elizabeth's own disgust, her eyes filled with tears.

"Now, don't worry!" Sister Angela's peremptoriness was born of long experience with just such emergencies as she now foresaw. "You can explain to the president—"

"The president!" The tears were shocked back, and blue suit suddenly seemed too large for the slight figure that shrank into it. "Sister, you're joking!"

"The order for suspension came from her," Sister Angela went on hurriedly, eager to get over the unpleasant business as soon as possible. "It's the penalty, you know; but if you explain—"

"I never spoke to the woman in my life!"

"Explain everything, and I'll put in a word. Your poor mother would be so distressed."

"She'd like me home for a while," remarked Elizabeth meditatively. "She says I don't go home often enough. She'd like me home. But suspension!"

"You can explain," reiterated Sister Angela. "I'll call up the president and make an appointment."

"Wait, please!"

Sister Angela, however, was already telephoning the switchboard operator for a connection with the president's office. In two short minutes the appointment was made—for that very evening. Elizabeth fell into a state of panic.

"What shall I say to her. Good heavens! I haven't spoken a word to the woman since I came to college! *She* won't believe me about the cigarettes. And what if she *should* suspend me?"

"You said you'd like to go home—"

"But not under a cloud!"

Sister Angela talked reassuringly for a long time, supporting her argument with frequent interpolations of the formula, "And of course you can explain," but quite quashing the effect of the whole discourse by observing in

conclusion, with what was a genuine sigh of sympathy, "Though the penalty *is* suspension. It's a rule—practically inevitable, you know."

Fritzie and Lou accompanied Elizabeth as far as the president's office that evening, Lou in a tremor of uncontrollable excitement, Fritzie affecting an imperturbability she was far from feeling. The indicted one, in an attempt to gloss over mortifying actuality, jested hilariously all the way along the corridor, and standing for a moment under the dim light outside the door, chanted to her bodyguard,

"When shall we three meet again? Is my hair on straight?"

"You look all right, but your teeth are chattering," declared Fritzie in judicial accent. "Here, put this on." She removed her sweater, a silky thing of cobalt green, and helped Elizabeth into it. "Very becoming. Goes well with that white skirt. You ought to get one."

"Thanks, hon." Elizabeth having jerked the garment about her, and made a swift sign of the cross, knocked at the official door. The tinkle of a bell within was evidently an invitation to enter. She pushed the door open. The light from an electric lamp inside shone for a second upon her face and upon her lovely hair magically touching it for a moment into the semblance of a halo of golden bronze. With a parting nod over her shoulder to her friends and a wave of her hand, she went into the sanctum and closed the door behind her.

"I feel as if she had—had said 'Goodby,'" whispered Louise hoarsely.

"We'll wait here on the stairs." Fritzie went over and sat on the second step; Lou followed her example. "She really ought to invest in a sweater like mine. She seemed prettier in it."

"She seemed eerie—ethereal—oh, I don't know the word—*different*," said Lou. "I feel as if someone had gone away."

"Sometimes, Louie," said Fritzie not unkindly, "you impress me as being slightly morbid."

They sat there in the dim corridor for a full hour, at the end of which time Elizabeth came forth from the office, smiling back at the personage within a friendly "Goodnight."

"Was I an age?"

They hurried downstairs and out into the courtyard.

"Was she awful?" Lou put the question.

"Marvelous! I could have talked longer, but I kept thinking of you two waiting for me. You poor kids, why did you wait? Golly, look at the stars!"

They raised eyes heavenwards in unison with her, and ejaculated their admiration of the glittering October sky.

"They *are* bright to-night," said Fritzie holding her voice on a perfect level. *She* would evince no vulgar curiosity regarding the interview.

Elizabeth fell to humming a song about all the to-morrows being like today, and broke murmuringly into the chorus,

"Goodbye, forever! Goodbye, forever!
Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, goodbye."

"Bet, will you keep still?" implored Lou. "I hate that song! Why don't you tell us what the president said?"

"Oh, sure enough! Well, let me see. She was perfectly fine about the cigarettes." Elizabeth spoke as if recalling a conference held in the remote past. "I explained and she understood perfectly. She was perfectly fine."

A yodel from the neighborhood of Santa Rita Hall indicated that they were within ken of some friendly watcher there.

"That's Amy," said Fritzie. "She's been wrought up to a terrible pitch over this."

She ran down the steps of the dormitory to meet them.

"How was it? Is it all right? I'm sick thinking about it! I stayed in the chapel praying for you for a whole half hour."

"You did? Good old Amy!" Elizabeth patted her appreciatively on the shoulder. "Note that, Pollywog, for the novel—a whole half hour."

"You're mean! I *did* pray," asserted Amy thoroughly at sea regarding the issue she imagined herself to be refuting.

"Honestly, it was awfully dear of you," returned Elizabeth, placing an arm round her and another round Louise. "You're all awfully good, and Fritzie's a precious darling of an icicle, and I don't know what I'll do without you all after this year—"

"Don't you dare mention it!" wailed Lou.

And Amy cried ferociously, "Do you want to be strangled on the spot?"

"We'd better be going in," suggested Fritzie. "I suppose you all have work to do, being classmates of mine."

"Aw, let's stay out for a while."

But Amy's entreaty was lest cogent than Fritzie's example. She went on into the dormitory, and the other three docilely followed her.

The next day Elizabeth "went home for a week."

"Rotten!" cried Amy. "What's the matter with this place anyway?"

She and Fritzie and Louise had gone over to the railroad station with the departing one.

"I'll call on that freshman just as soon as I can find her room," said Fritzie, narrowing her eyes, yet preserving her indignation well in balance. "I'll call on her, and tell her that if she dares to spread the news—"

"She won't dare if you look like that," chuckled Elizabeth.

Fritzie under stress of intense feeling presented a rare study, indeed a study quite unique. "She won't. I assure you of that." She pressed her lips tightly together

and stared hard at the post-office beyond the end of the station platform.

"Any message for Billy? I may see him while I'm home."

Fritzie's facial lines relaxed. "He's going to telephone this afternoon. I had a letter from him yesterday."

"Be nice to the freshman," laughed Elizabeth.

"It's the president I'd like to have a word with," said Amy savagely. "Hasn't she any mentality at all?"

"We agreed—" Elizabeth offered her explanation with reluctance and obviously impelled by a desire to exonerate the head of the institution—"we agreed that if I didn't go, the news would spread, and the practice would spread, because everyone would or could say that a senior did it—"

"But you didn't," put in Amy sharply.

"Had 'em on the campus—against rules. They'd say that I did it and went free. And so in the interests of example—"

"Rubbish!" interjected Amy.

"And besides," continued Elizabeth inconsequently, "I'm awfully glad to get home for a week with Mother."

"What will you tell her?" Amy had a morbid penchant for detail.

"The facts of the case. She'll understand. I tell her everything of importance—that is," she added coloring slightly, "sometimes."

The train drew in. The three said farewell to the exile, and she, with head drooping ever so little, having stepped aboard, was swiftly carried from their sight by the peerless "bankers' express" of the D. L. and W.

"I could reel off a nice colorful page for your novel just now, Louie," said Amy between her teeth.

"Don't bother," returned Lou, a strained look of self-suppression upon her round face. "I could do nicely myself without a great deal of effort."

Fritzie, falling far short in her vicarious expression of their inhibited impulses, murmured gently to herself,

"That darn freshman!"

Elizabeth's enforced vacation terminated on the eve of the alumnae reunion, the first week in November. She came back looking worn and anxious. "Mother's worried crazy over Jack," she confided to Louise. "I was glad to be home with her. She hasn't heard from him in an age. Father cabled Mr. Remon for information this morning."

In consequence of these tidings dark and doubtful, it was a somewhat distraught Lou that Nell engaged or tried to engage in conversation after the alumnae luncheon the next day. They had strolled out to walk near the chapel. Here groups of Elizabethans, young, old, and middle-aged, were standing about indulging in the usual biographical inquiries or autobiographical narratives, or in mere comment—pardonable surely because of the universal appeal of the subject—upon the fatness or leanness of their compeers. Some, it is true, were more solemnly engrossed—discussing projects for making their college the first in the country, dwelling heatedly upon the meager publicity secured by an inert faculty for their beloved *alma mater*, and recounting the number of pictures of *other* colleges which they had seen (not without chagrin) in the photogravure sections of newspapers throughout the land. Nell left serious problems to the "classes," taking her stand with the "masses," proudly and, it is to be feared, lazily, too.

"What's this I hear about Bet?" she said to Louise. "The little simpleton! Now she won't get honors at graduation. Look at her over there talking to Addie. Addie's made a hit on the stage, sure enough. I saw her the other night. Really to hear her you'd think she had a first grade intelligence, and you remember—or

maybe you don't because you weren't in any courses with her—here at college she didn't seem to have a brain in her head. A sort of parrot, you know. She's quite fond of Bet—says she'll get her into her cast next year if Bet wants to go on. Addie's going to bring her father up to the commencement week play—I suppose there'll be one—and he's going to interview Bet. So Addie says. I don't believe it. Picture it! A big city stage-manager! He'll never come!"

"It would be wonderful!" exclaimed Louise. "Such an opportunity for Bet! I do hope he will come, because of course she will have the leading part in our commencement play—her last at college."

"I must hand it *to* her—" Nell manifestly begrudged the concession—"she knows how to act. She's better than Addie ever was—more natural and much more attractive. The tall woman beyond Bet is a doctor."

"Our alumna?"

"Ours," nodded Nell. "And the woman with her is a journalist—woman's page or something—"

"So many of them do it," murmured Lou.

"Waste. Who reads their stuff? Cooking is better. Don't be a journalist, Lou. Take my advice. What are you going to do anyway?" asked Nell suddenly, staring severely down at her undergraduate friend.

More than one undergraduate has been embarrassed by this brutal interrogatory. Lou gave her head a jerk and mumbled,

"I don't know."

Nell's attention was happily diverted by another alumna who passed hurriedly by. "Oh, my, my! There goes Helen What's-her-name! She's out about ten years—a big political woman in the West. She's running for the train. Politics have not impaired her daintiness."

Their eyes followed the lady along the paved walk under the sear-leafed maple trees.

"Is it possible?" Nell stooped and peered beyond the

point which Helen What's-her-name had reached. "It is!"

"It is!" repeated Lou, her voice winging up to its highest pitch under stress of excitement. She ran forward, followed at a leisurely pace by Nell. Both waved hands in welcome.

"Oh, it is so good to see you!" cried Alicia when the violence of her first greeting had abated. "It is so very good—"

"But how did you come, and when," asked Nell straightening her hat which had in the mêlée assumed the likeness of a felt aureole at the back of her head, "and why?"

"Don't you want me here?" Alicia pouted. "I just couldn't stay away. I begged Papa. I am up for the winter—with my aunt with whom I shall stay in New York. I like the States. I like my own country, too, but I must leave it sometimes. *Ay!*" She looked hither and thither at the groups moving across the campus. "I am very late. The boat just docked this morning. The luncheon is over, but I do not care—"

"Come. We'll find Bet, and get something for you to eat." Lou spoke feverishly, her uppermost sentiment, indeed, not hospitality for the guest, but a burning hope that Elizabeth would ask—the conviction that she *must* ask the question which fear of self-betrayal alone forced back from her own eager lips.

"Bet?" Alicia stood still, a shadow of seriousness passing over her face. "Bet? Does she know? Has she heard anything? Does she know about Jack?"

CHAPTER XII

A NEW CONSPIRATOR

THE weeks of November dragged wearily along, with days when even the sunlight rested dead upon the world, and nights when one awoke with a start to hear outside what one's morbid fancy interpreted to be the steps of passing ghosts, but what the small balance of one's common sense informed one was merely the faint dry sound of frost-crisped leaves breaking and falling from the trees. At some unexpected time there would come from the Stedman family a message of hope; at another, a line not altogether encouraging; and again there would be a heart-crushing interval broken by no tidings at all when Bet in desperation would telephone to Jim or Bob or Margy only to learn that Jack was "Just about the same." For the news confided by Alicia on alumnae day to Nell and Louise was the quite paralyzing fact of Jack's serious illness in a hospital in the far-away island. A cable message, so Bet's brother Jim telephoned her that night, had reached the family shortly after her departure for college; and the next morning, the morning of the alumnae re-union, Mrs. Stedman herself and Phil—providentially lacking employment—had sailed forthwith to Cuba.

On an afternoon toward the end of the month, like that memorable one of her father's last visit to her—when trees and campus were shining crystal, and glittering ice-jewels were scattered over the white ground—Louise trudged alone up the hill to class, her thoughts entirely given over to melancholy. It is true she had

experienced a moderate measure of relief from mental pain a few days before when, at luncheon with Alicia in New York, in the midst of an apparent preoccupation with her cinnamon toast, she had brought herself to say as if half-musingly,

"One thing I have not been able to understand is your leaving Cuba when Jack was so ill."

"What could I do for him?" Alicia had replied, her eyes busy with the menu card. "He was far away in the interior, and besides was well cared for."

"But just to be down there," murmured Louise. "You know—just to be there!"

"But why?" Alicia cast a glance of disfavor upon *her* cinnamon toast. "I will give another order. I cannot eat this." She turned her attention again to the menu. "I saw little of Jack."

"I thought you liked him."

"Oh, yes, very much, sometimes. Plain buttered toast, I think. Yes." She summoned a waitress and ordered the food.

"Aleesh, the girls say you will be a nun." Louise's heart was beating wildly.

"Because I like to pray—yes? They are mistaken. I shall live in the world. I can do much good in the world. I like to be free. I shall travel." She had clasped her hands and smiled admiringly at Louise. "Will you travel with me?" Nor would she listen to a plea for time to consider the invitation. "But you should know! I know just what I shall do in my future—"

"If your husband lets you."

"There will be none." A wave of the hand suppressed even the imagined vision of that person. "I shall travel all around the world." She had sighed in satisfaction over the glamourous prospect.

For Louise, the rest of that day had been rapture. She had walked with her head in the clouds. But the morrow had brought her earthward once more, and now, trudg-

ing up the hill, she reflected sadly that even with Alicia, planning, heart whole and fancy free, a tour of both hemispheres, life still held dreary possibilities. For example, people sometimes died in November. Lou's own father had done so. She stood near Santa Maria Hall, and gazed gloomily down over the valley—white and gray as it had been on that other November day, with the hills slate blue beyond. Her father had spoken of Jack that day. . . .

"Hello, Pollywog!" Elizabeth, a few paces back, called her and signaled her with a letter. "From Mother." She came over breathlessly, and, an arm across Lou's shoulder, read aloud.

He has gone through a very serious illness. We must say fervent prayers of thanksgiving that he is safe. The doctor declares all danger to be absolutely past, but the fever has left him extremely weak. I must tell you something that happened shortly after I arrived. One night in delirium, he cried out, and when I ran to him, I distinguished the words, 'Lou! Lou!' Can it be that. . . .

Elizabeth stopped suddenly as if struck, and, having turned her head to see Louise, white, but with eyes quite courageously direct, slowly withdrew the friendly weight of her arm.

"Did he mean you?"

"How do I know?" asked Louise tremulously, her face now aflame.

"He must have!" whispered Elizabeth still staring. "There isn't any other Lou. He must have—" And the faintest shadow of a distrustful look passed swiftly over her countenance.

"He never, never, never even implied—implied anything like that!" cried Louise in anguish of self-defense.

"Louie, it's all right!" Elizabeth spoke hurriedly in palpable fear of disaster. "It's all right. It's your business—"

"I would have told you if he had," continued Louise still agonizing. "I would have told you!"

The friendly arm had once more found its way across her shoulder, though it rested lightly there, and Elizabeth was murmuring incoherently, "It's all right—perfectly all right! Don't let me bother you at all! It's all right, I tell you!"

It was time for their class, a relieving circumstance which provided a reason for turning and walking toward the building. At the door Louise stopped.

"Bet, I want to ask you something—a favor. Please, don't tell your mother I know. I don't want Jack to know I know. Please!"

Elizabeth acquiesced though prophesying that her mother would extract all available information from him just as soon as she perceived that he was strong enough for lengthy speech.

That night Louise telephoned to Aunt Ellie on the subject. Her aunt joyously replied that now, with this knowledge of Jack's sentiments, she would carry out her plan. Louise requested details.

"I'm going to write to him," said Aunt Ellie.

"No! No! Don't! Do you hear?"

"Yes, darling, I hear. I hear perfectly."

Nevertheless Aunt Ellie continued to think highly of her subtle scheme, and wrote expansively to Louise regarding its advantages. Louise, unable to refute these arguments by mail—for her letters were common property at home, and Cousin Brenda must be reckoned with—passed the weeks until Christmas vacation in a torture of uncertainty. But the very first day of the Christmas vacation, she was assured by Aunt Ellie when they were alone, that no message had gone from her to Jack. In that, at least, there was some consolation. There was considerably more in the circumstance that Mrs. Stedman had reached home with news of the patient's improvement, which news Elizabeth, the loyal-hearted, tele-

phoned to Lou, early Christmas morning. Later in the week, on her visit to the Stedmans, she thought sensitively that she perceived in Mrs. Stedman's manner something of disengagement, and even discerned in Elizabeth at times a certain degree of constraint. Nevertheless it was inexpressibly comforting to hear directly about Jack and to be there one afternoon when a letter arrived from him saying that Phil would leave for home in a week and that Jack himself would, perhaps, go up in the spring. "That depends," he had cryptically added, and, in an underscored sentence, enjoined the family to request all his friends please to write to him. Mentally accounting herself at least one of these, Lou on reaching home immediately dispatched to him a vivid and lengthy description of her visit with the family, a monograph which, had he been at all inclined to nostalgia, would have drawn him straightway to their loving arms. His answer, however, attested his state of mind to be quite the contrary. Something held him fast in Cuba. And subsequent letters, as well as this, lucidly proved that his interests were still of a monetary nature, though Louise longed for something otherwise—for a larger perception of her sentiments than his rather impersonal pages revealed—the one luminous hope enkindled by the outcry of his delirium still abiding with her, but lighting her way faintly and threatening to become a mere memory soon, dubiously if at all inspiriting.

Phil and his mother were at the college for a musicale in the middle of February—Lincoln's Birthday. Louise and Elizabeth sang in the glee club. From her place in the first row Louise could see Mrs. Stedman smiling up affectionately and appreciatively at them as if they constituted the entire chorus of voices. Afterwards, however, she appeared to Lou's nervous consciousness rather unduly reserved though the impersonation, as always, of gentle courtesy itself. But Phil, when his mother and sister were talking with the dean at the doorway of the

auditorium, asked hurriedly of Lou, with quite motionless lips,

"Do you write to Jack?"

She nodded.

"Good. Keep on. Best tonic for him."

"Phil—" His mother turned to introduce him to the dean, and Lou, watching him pay his devoirs with the bow most fashionable among his contemporaries, pronounced him in her heart the prince of brotherly boys. "The very brotherliest!"

So now, she reflected again and again during the days that followed, in addition to being a friend she was a tonic! If only she could fathom Elizabeth's strange attitude and her mother's! Intermittent meditations upon the wearing subject were at length fruitful of a plausible surmise, which she planned to broach bluntly to Elizabeth just as soon as opportunity offered. And opportunity offered very soon—on a day at the end of that month in fact, when they were sitting in Elizabeth's room, Louise trying conscientiously to read and understand an assignment in Cardinal Newman's *Apologia,* her less eager classmate marking off on a calendar the days that remained to them of college life.

"Commencement week!" She had proceeded some distance into the month of June. "Baccalaureate Sunday—" she continued to strike out the printed dates—"the play, reception day, class night. My whole family is coming up for that; and Father, and Mother, and Margy was going to stay overnight in Morristown so that they can attend the commencement day Mass. Nine o'clock it's going to be. Debby Morgan's brother is going to say it. He was just ordained last September." Elizabeth sighed. "It must be wonderful to have a brother a priest!"

Louise plunged. "Do you—do you want Jack to be one?" She did not raise her eyes from her book, though on its inspired pages she saw only a black blur.

"Jack? Why, Louie!" The intonation hinted at a slight doubt concerning the sincerity of the question.

"You said so once."

"But that was long ago—a notion of mine. And things are different. I'd love it if it were his vocation, but—" Elizabeth went over to thumb-tack her calendar on the wall.

"I thought your mother and you—" Louise realized that her effort to be casual was utterly forlorn.

"Mother never said anything about it to me, and *I* only hoped." Elizabeth pressed hard upon the thumb-tack, then turned round and regarded the sad face before her with an air half serious, half quizzical.

"There's something wrong somewhere." Louise closed the *Apologia*, and lifted mournful eyes toward her friend.

"There's something wrong with you, child." Her friend—and oh, she was convincingly her friend—crossed to the window, and, looking out with excessive interest at the snowy landscape, added, "You need some fresh air and exercise. I tell you what! Let's go coasting!"

Though the proposition was baldly an evasion, acquiescence seemed the only or at least the most tactful next step. Accordingly, they went out, and on the hillside near the left of Santa Rita Hall joined a party—a party comprising mainly freshmen and sophomores.

"It's embarrassing," muttered Elizabeth. "Let's go somewhere else."

On their way to somewhere else they met Amy who suggested as the most hair-raising region for coasting, Seton Drive, or that part of it which leads steeply from the bend at the top of the hill near O'Connor Hall, to the villa, an eighth of a mile below.

"Jolly!" Elizabeth ran on ahead, stumbling through the drifts and pulling an appropriated sled after her.

She set out first, alone, on that perilous ride down the hill, her sled springing and bumping over rough places at break-neck speed, and threatening momently to hurl her

into rocks or trees or shrubbery by the way. Amy and Lou elected to go down companionably on a small bob. Almost from the instant of starting, both foresaw disaster, and in a brief few seconds, the mere hint of a hope became theirs of escaping with their lives as, at an alarming and ever increasing rate, they whizzed over the icy uneven ground, swaying this way and that and breathlessly exhorting each other to "Hold on!" to "Hold on!" to "Hold on!" Down, down, down they sped, past white fields, past a mass of gray stone—the laundry—past a flash of yellow brick—the school for little boys—past the dull conglomerate of the villa, until they were aiming directly for the open gate at the foot of the hill.

"Turn off! Turn off!" shouted Elizabeth, struggling up from a snow-drift into which she had been thrown, in the field on the right.

Too late! They shot through the gateway and across the road. The sled swerved wickedly as it struck a hidden boulder in the ditch, and, with the stars of heaven for them tumbling wildly about in a sudden and encompassing darkness, both were flung violently against the posts and barbed wire of the pastureland fence. Quick as she could reach them, Elizabeth was there, endeavoring to disentangle them from the wreckage, and earnestly beseeching Amy to stop groaning as if she were dead. Louise was so stunned that, for several moments, she just lay silently in the snow, her head buzzing, an ankle paining as if from a knife-thrust, and her left arm numb and limp by her side. On opening her eyes she saw Amy sitting up with a blood-stained handkerchief pressed against her forehead.

"We're disfigured for life," she was moaning. "Look at me! I could swear my nose is broken!"

"If you'll stand it for a while," exhorted Elizabeth tugging at Lou's aching shoulders, "I'll run to the villa for help."

On her summons, help arrived expeditiously in the

form of a capable rosy-faced sister, her arms encircling a goodly supply of liniments, splints, and bandages. She was followed possibly six or seven minutes later by George, the stolid convent chauffeur, for the nonce piloting a horse and surrey, relics of a gentler age.

"You're not going to die," the sister heartily assured the two injured coasters. She had off-handedly washed away the gore from Amy's brow, and was now binding it up with yards and yards of gauze. "No, your nose is all right," she replied to Amy's fearsome and repeated interrogatories regarding the state of that quite aristocratic feature of her countenance. "This child's arm is strained, and her ankle, and that's a bad scratch on her cheek." She assisted Lou into the carriage. "Someone ought to have warned you against that hill. Freshmen don't realize the danger."

No one of three seniors claimed her proper status. Amy climbed weakly in to a place beside Lou, and the sister followed, while Elizabeth humbly solicited a place beside George. They drove at funeral pace up the hill, and reported the accident to a disgusted prefect at Santa Rita Hall, who immediately dispatched the two sufferers to the infirmary on the third floor in the main building.

To Louise, the circumstance that she, a senior and twenty-one, had received her hurts through indulgence in the childish pastime of coasting, was at first unutterably mortifying. Not so Amy. She expressed herself frankly as being on the whole contented with a few days of retirement from active duty. She said she needed the rest, and, besides, she just adored to have her meals brought to her on a tray and to have milk served to her at ten in the morning and crackers and cocoa at three. In addition to these amenities of life in the infirmary, there were the flowers that came, condoling gift from the class, and ice-cream and other delicacies from the "crowd." She was not going to complain. The preservation of her nose, too, in its pristine condition of

straightness was a blessing to be eternally grateful for. Louise was eventually and effectually lifted out of her humiliated mood and stimulated to actual thanksgiving for the results of that wild ride down the hill by a visit from Aunt Ellie. Aunt Ellie had visited the college only once before—in Lou's freshman year—for the purpose of investigating the living quarters which she had half suspected of some ancestral relation to appointments in the Dark Ages. She had come now upon receiving a notification from some college authority regarding Lou's injuries.

"You're darling!" The strained ankle still prohibited standing, and so sitting there in her invalid chair, the patient opened arms wide to welcome her dear guest.

"And it isn't serious." Aunt Ellie bent over to kiss her. "The nurse said so. Cousin Brenda couldn't come—"

"Fortunately!" laughed Louise. "It's bliss to have you alone."

"What news?" Aunt Ellie drew a chair over, and closed the door of the little infirmary room.

"They really don't want him to be a priest—that is, they don't expect him to be."

"Of course not. I never thought it."

"Phil sent me some snapshots of Jack and him taken before he left Cuba. They're in an envelope in that book on the bureau."

Aunt Ellie found the envelope and studied it carefully before she looked at the pictures. In fact she appeared to be more interested in Phil's penmanship than in Jack.

"He works here?" She pointed to the business address in the corner.

"Phil? Yes. Isn't Jack thin?"

"Is he a pleasant boy?"

Her niece stared at her uncomprehendingly.

"I mean Phil."

"Awfully nice—you know, very refined, but trying all

the while to seem rough—hates people to think he's nice —and he worships Jack."

Aunt Ellie was absentmindedly folding the envelope into a compact small square shape. Later she quite as absentmindedly slipped it into her purse.

"Brenda's planning a trip to Europe for all of us in June."

"Couldn't you stop it?"

"I told her it would be too fatiguing. My heart won't stand it—at least, I think it won't."

"I will not go." A stubborn light stood in Lou's honest eyes of blue. "I'm of age. Tell her I won't go."

"She's afraid that you're planning something else—to spend the summer with the Stedmans."

"I don't think they'll ask me," sighed Louise, wearily dropping her face upon her hands.

Aunt Ellie adjured her for the thousandth time to cease worrying. "I pledged myself to help you, and I will. I have an idea," she added.

"You won't write to Jack, please!"

"Oh, no, no!"

"And you won't call on Mrs. Stedman!"

"Not at all!" Aunt Ellie resented Mrs. Stedman's reserve. "I'll never speak to her!"

"She's awfully dear, really. I just don't understand—"

"Maybe Jack told her what Brenda said."

"I don't think so, though he might have told Phil."

Louise, absorbed in admiration of one of the snapshots, failed to note that this remark had quite electrified her usually mild and unexcitable relative.

"Is Phil a blond?" One might have thought Aunt Ellie was planning to adopt him.

"No—neutral." Each snapshot in turn was now receiving its tenth regardful contemplation. "But he has a nice fresh face and an awfully kind mouth. He loves Jack."

"People do," murmured Aunt Ellie demurely.

"Are you making fun of me?" Louise looked up quickly. "It doesn't seem a laughing matter to me."

"But it soon will be," averred Aunt Ellie with confidence. "I feel very young and interested, dearie, since you told me, and it's going to be all right. We're going to laugh about it some day very happily." Hopeful words never found more persuadable heart, and so it was a buoyant smiling invalid that Aunt Ellie bent over once more to kiss when she said goodby.

The next day, at the request of the author, Elizabeth brought over the novel, honorably desisting on the way from reading even a syllable of it. Work upon it was almost an obligation in the large leisure offered by temporary residence in the infirmary, and it was imperative for the further reason that the completed manuscript was due to pass through the crucible of Sister Margaret's criticism before commencement. And commencement was not very far off—though, and this also impelled one to work harder, before commencement there was spring.

It was about a week after Aunt Ellie's visit that Elizabeth announced the beginning of her novena. "It's to be a pilgrimage all by myself. I'm going to walk down to Our Lady's grotto near the villa every day after class. I'm praying for something special. So, hon, I can't be up early to call on you, but I'll hop in later in the evening if you don't mind."

Louise did mind. She missed Elizabeth's cheering company at that four o'clock hour and her lively reports of the annual ferment accompanying important senior preoccupations—the commencement week program, committees, the year-book, the class-day budget, the songs for the college "hum," and all the rest. When Elizabeth came in the evening, moreover, communication upon topics vital and dearly familiar was invariably thwarted

by the presence of a battalion of other classmates, among them Amy completely restored to the world of health and action.

"I wish your novena were over," said the invalid one night when Elizabeth was leaving, having lingered a moment after the less welcome crowd.

"It will be over in a few days."

"Have you heard from Jack lately?"

"Not a line—nor has Mother, either. Phil had a letter, but you can't drag information from Phil. He condescended to tell us, however, that Jack continues to improve and is the busiest of the sons of toil once more. Haven't you heard?"

Lou shook her head and muttered a despondent "No."

The sister of the delinquent had no immediate consolation to offer, and on hearing the jingle of the infirmarian's keys, was fain to depart with a hurried "Goodnight."

It was three days later that Louise wandered out of her infirmary quarters—for she was permitted to walk about now—and vaguely in search of recreation mounted at a safely slow pace a flight of stairs to the fourth floor. Here she turned down the "wing" corridor—beloved "alley" of unnumbered freshmen—and found herself at length out upon a high verandah commanding a view of that part of the campus which slopes upward to the plateau. It was a black and white day. A heavy rain the previous night and that morning had washed the landscape clean of the snow, transforming each bare tree of the woodland beyond Santa Rita Hall into a column of ebony glistening in the peculiar half light of a gray clouded sky. The long symmetrical contour of the dormitory itself stood out bright against the dark background of the trees, each little dormer window of the fourth story painting itself a distinct shadow upon the shining slate roof. Around the corner of O'Connor Hall at the summit of the slope, and down the path through

the woodland came Elizabeth, swinging a closed umbrella, evidently homeward bound from her "pilgrimage," her brisk gait no uncertain index of her happy mood. When she had reached a point where the woodland path meets the Santa Maria walk, she was stopped by Amy Pasker who attempted to give her something—a little white something—a letter, Louise was quite sure. But the pilgrim, appearing to disclaim ownership of the obpect being thrust upon her, pointed in the direction of the main building. She was forced at length to yield to Amy's urging, and—while the latter ran on up the hill toward Santa Maria—Elizabeth, having glanced at the envelope—yes, it *was* an envelope—began running also down past Santa Rita Hall. Recalling in a flash, then, that she had engaged Amy as her mail-carrier for that day, Lou sped in from her watch-tower, and having retraced her steps as swiftly as she could along the "alley," ran with halting foot the half length of "Broadway"—another corridor of freshman fame—and, hand sliding along the balustrade, went stumbling precariously down three hampering flights of stairs. At the door opening upon the courtyard she stood face to face with Elizabeth.

"A letter for you." She blinked a little at seeing Lou there.

"I know. It's from—it must be from—"

Jack's sister nodded in friendly-wise. Then leaning her head against the frame of the doorway, a smile of something like self-consciousness upon her lips, she said,

"I finished my novena to Our Lady to-day—for Jack and for you."

CHAPTER XIII

THE DÉNOUEMENT

CONVENT in spring is unparalleled for loveliness —except in some occasional off-year when a rainy season sets in. Lou's senior year happened to be an off-year—at least during April and the first week of May. She cared not. Jack's letter had said that his journey to the States in May was solely dependent upon her wish. Should he come? She had written him a "Surely, surely!" and had thereafter been deluged with cables, picture postal cards, and lengthy fervent epistles in which there was gratifyingly no mention of high or low finance. The picture postal cards she shared with Elizabeth. *She* simulated indifference to the longer communications, once or twice, indeed, offering an excuse for her failure to evince a proper sisterly interest. "I'm so rushed with rehearsals." She was practicing the leading rôle for the commencement week play. Addie, on a flying visit one afternoon, had again promised to bring her father up for the final performance. In fact he had solemnly pledged himself to come. Elizabeth's friends and classmates thrilled to the idea, but she herself appeared altogether dubious of its advantages.

"Please, don't bring him, Ad," she pleaded. "I'll be frightfully awed and—"

"Don't listen to her. It's a marvelous opportunity," put in Louise.

She could afford to be enthusiastic since life for her had assumed an absolutely new and glamourous perspec-

tive. Her revived spirits, moreover, stimulated her to fresh creative endeavor. She was convinced that now, now she could finish *Her Goal!* And if she did not finish it, well the loss to her and to the world would not be precisely momentous. As a matter of actuality, however, events seemed to be pointing quite definitely to the dénouement which she had planned. Her novel could and would have a happy ending! Life—despite the "realists" —who were not realists at all, but poor blind materialists—life *was* happy! She would prove it to them! Even Fritzie's part in the plot harmonized, if not with the initial design, at least with later emendations, for Fritzie would announce her engagement to Billy immediately after commencement. Details of technique alone troubled the author now. The incident of Billy's proposal, for example, made her ridge her brows more than once when she settled herself for work at her little desk, her manuscript in order before her. She was thus for the sixth time, one afternoon, wavering between an elaborate presentation of the scene and—in proof of her superiority to mere dramatics—a casual mention of it, when her ivory clock on the dressing-table authoritatively solved the problem. Two twenty. Mail hour. A sentence would do for Fritzie and Billy. As for the author, she must run down to the lower foyer and examine her mail-box!

The letter was there, of course, and of course she read it through in eager haste at first—scarcely aware of its contents—on her way upstairs to the main foyer. There Olga, beaming and shiny-faced, announced, "A lady in the r'ception room for you—a lady in gray," and handed Louise her stepmother's card.

Mrs. Maxon rose somewhat diffidently to greet her step-daughter. On the latter's countenance there appeared an expression of happiness hardly to be attributed, as the lady in gray was only too well convinced, to her unexpected visit.

"I've come on business," she explained, shaking doubtfully the hand extended to her.

"Let's sit over near this window." Louise led the way. "This chair is more comfortable." The blue eyes did not as of yore, to Mrs. Maxon's amazement, avow their unmitigated dislike for her.

"You look well," she said, "and contented."

"I am both. Spring always makes me feel happy." She added a little awkwardly, "I hope you are, too."

Mrs. Maxon was sensibly surprised at the cordiality implicit in the conventional speech. Her face lighted with pleasure, and to Lou, for the first time in their acquaintance, appeared really attractive.

The business was explained. There was to be a trip to Europe in June. It would last a year—possibly two years. The old house was to be disposed of.

"I'll buy it from you," Lou said.

"I thought you might like to. But the purchase will diminish your income."

"I don't care. I want the house that was my father's and my mother's. I used to think when the estate was so long getting settled, that if it were ever necessary, I could earn money," she said, absentmindedly slipping Jack's letter in and out of its envelope. A glance out the window caught the faint crimson of budding maples —another of the myriad signs of spring that even the rain could not hide from her. She smiled at her little triumph over the season's trickery. "Even if I had been obliged to, it wouldn't have been for long."

Her smile reflected itself on her stepmother's lips, finding there a new response of sympathy.

"Is that so?" The black brown eyes, softening, rested significantly upon the envelope.

Lou nodded and laughed and colored a bit. "Jack Stedman," she said in a burst of daughterly confidence, and was glad of the well-shaped hand that reached out to clasp hers.

They talked for a few minutes longer. Negotiations for the sale of the house, they decided, could be entrusted to their respective attorneys. Train-time came suddenly.

"I'm sorry I must go. I have an engagement. If I had known—" Mrs. Maxon spoke hesitatingly. "But perhaps some day you'll visit me. We can talk." At the door she took both Lou's hands, and bending down, kissed her on the forehead. "I hope you'll be very, very happy. Possibly though, you'll hate me more than ever when I tell you that I am to be married again before I go abroad."

"Oh, no! I don't hate anyone." Louise raised sincere eyes to her stepmother's.

"I have a gift for you—a graduation gift—something your father highly valued. I'll mail it to you to-night."

"I'll love it!"

Mrs. Maxon waved a goodby as she descended the steps of the dormitory. Lou waved and nodded back, then hurried up to her room where once more in blissful solitude, she read Jack's letter.

The next day brought her stepmother's gift—a delicate chain and a locket containing a picture of Lou's own mother and a tiny gold medal engraved with an image of the Blessed Virgin. Louise fastened the treasure about her neck, a novel feeling of utter security hers, saying with a joyous chuckle at circumstances,

"Now, I'm a papist surely—and for all the world, with the help of the honorable Mrs. Cartright!"

The rainy weather, which gave no sign of immediate permanent abatement, possessed a compensatory value through its power to keep Louise indoors at her college work and at her novel. For in the rare hours when the drizzle or downpour temporarily ceased, she was prone to wander away to remote parts of the grounds and to sit idly watching the season go by. Down below the terraces in front of Xavier Hall, under a great oak, she found a rock which no one on the campus appeared to

want in the morning. And in the evening she often stole out alone to that broad second verandah of the main building to rest silently upon the beauty of the late spring —the lush green of grass, and of thick growing beech and linden and sycamore, with here a splash of white dogwood or a stipple of hawthorn like faint spray against the sward, and above them the paling sky delicately brushed with lines of violet cloud, and quite near, the shadowy point-winged swallows circling and circling about the chapel tower. The rainy days drove her to the library and ensured an intermittent though definitely waning attention on her part to the curriculum. Final examinations she must needs prepare for if she wanted her degree—and she was in a sufficiently normal state of mind to want it. As to *Her Goal*, a certain generous quota of her "free hours" must be spent upon it if it were to be completed, even in the rough, before Jack's arrival. From time to time she dreamily wove the threads of her story into that full and altogether gratifying tapestry for which life was almost too generously furnishing the pattern. Addie's father, for example, would help Elizabeth. And oh, what an actress she would be! And every night they—Jack and Lou—would have a box, and call for her after the play. And then Lou might even write a play for Elizabeth, and maybe Jack could have a part in it—he had once, so his sister had reported, made a hit in a minstrel show—and she, Lou herself, could have a minor rôle—a waitress, perhaps. But no! Far better that she and Jack remain in their box, and when the audience called, "Author! Author!" Jack would present her to them, and she would smile and bow and make an effective little speech. But the cream of the applause would be for Elizabeth.

To Elizabeth—who was still in the dark regarding her distinction as the heroine of a novel of impending celebrity—Louise confided fragments of her dreams.

"Oh, Louie!"

It was an evening opaque, flat, soggy. They were just stepping forth from Santa Rita Hall on their way to a music recital in the auditorium.

"Don't you think dreams come true?" The dreamer's voice challenged her friend's protest.

"I dreamed last night that the rain had stopped." The statement carried more force than the most emphatic of negatives.

They set out on a run toward Xavier Hall.

"Just the same they do," panted Louise.

"Do what?"

"Come true."

"Maybe." It was indifferently said. "I wouldn't be going to this thing to-night," Elizabeth went on irrelevantly, "if one of the class weren't to perform."

"There you are! Class spirit first always." Louise skipped ungracefully over a puddle.

"Love the college just the same," breathlessly declared Elizabeth.

"Dear! And don't I! And to think of the way I felt four years ago!" They joined the throng of students moving on up to the auditorium. "I never dreamed a lot of things then."

"Precious, come out of it," exhorted Elizabeth with an amused sidelong glance at Louise. "Life is full of facts."

"Life is full of—" She hesitated for the comprehensive word.

"Jack," laughed Elizabeth, and ran on ahead to secure places in the last row so that, in the emergency of being bored, she and her companion might unobtrusively withdraw.

They were both unusually quiet during the recital, the music colored and enhanced by their respective preoccupations—dreams, Louise would have called them. At the end, they stole out and hurried down the first stairway before the crowd. Someone was opening the door leading out upon the "arcade—" the tiled and parapeted

roof of the two-storied structure linking Xavier Hall with the central buildings.

"It's still raining." Louise made the statement if with no pride in its originality, at least with a firm conviction of its truth.

"No, it isn't!" Elizabeth was over the threshold and out on the arcade, head lifted toward the sky. "The stars are out!"

"Oh, the stars! And the moon!" A note of joyous surprise rang through Lou's exclamation.

The two went over, as if through a single impulse, and leaned elbows upon the parapet facing the front campus.

"Look at the chapel tower!" Elizabeth called attention to it as she might to something neither had seen before. And on this night truly, its lines, though familiar and dear, presented, in their soft merging with a background of scattering cloud, an aspect wholly new.

"It's lovely! And look!" Louise pointed ecstatically to a bright planet shining moistily halfway between the zenith and the tree-tops.

The recital audience was now moving through the doorway and past them.

"Oh, the stars are out!"

"Oh, look at the stars!"

"Oh, look at the moon!"

The voices were gently buoyant in the night air as the girls paused in little groups to gaze skyward.

"The stars! What a relief!"

"When have we seen the stars before?"

Louise was inexpressibly moved, exalted; her author heart, moreover, was touched by the scene and warmed at the very conventiality of the spontaneous phrases of appreciation. She was conscious of an odd fear lest someone, some stray student intellectual—and the campus was not entirely free from the type—might attempt clever comment to mar the lovely mood of the night and of these girls—her college sisters—whom she wanted to

remember as they really were—unaffected, sincere, and aiming, most of them, at what they knew to be the highest.

"The stars! The stars!" The voices went lilting across the arcade.

"Hello, Lou!" a passing sophomore musically called the greeting.

"'Lo!" The reply went back in sympathetic tone. "Bet," she said suddenly, "I know so many more of the girls than I thought I knew."

"I love 'em."

"Me, too."

Silence. Then,

"After all, Bet, your dream about fine weather *did* come true."

"Part of it," conceded Elizabeth hooking an arm through Lou's and drawing her away from the parapet. "Look—" she waved a gesture toward her right. "Santa Rita's like a toy house from here—with all the windows lighted. Isn't it—isn't it—" She could not find the satisfyingly descriptive word. "And in a few weeks—"

"Oh, Bet!" The exclamation was half an anguished sob.

"Oh, Louie!" The response echoed the agony.

They walked along, at a distance following the crowd to the dormitory, aware of a shadowy poignant something in their hearts that seemed to them suffering or sorrow, and yet aware, too, of the ever brightening stars in the clearing heavens above them.

The stars proved to be the harbingers of a long balmy interval toward the end of May, an interval during which *Her Goal* was deliberately and thoroughly neglected, an interval bright with hope for Louise up to the very last day of the month, on which day, setting out early for a sociology trip, it must be admitted, she appeared to be rather lugubrious. Nor was the objective of the trip —the state institutions at Laurel Hill—the cause of her

low spirits. On the contrary, sociological studies and the whole idea of social service made a special appeal to her in her not infrequent moods of altruism. Her dejection was most noticeable when she walked away from her empty mail-box. She examined it again on her return from the city at three o'clock in the afternoon. Not even a letter! In her room she sat dully meditating the fluctuations and vicissitudes which belong by nature to our time of trial in this world, when Elizabeth called for her.

"Going in the procession?"

Lou shook her head glumly in acquiescence. The procession in honor of the Blessed Virgin took place annually on this date, the thirty-first of May. The thirty-first of May! With a sigh Lou rose, and having banged her college cap at a superlatively unbecoming angle over her left ear, followed Elizabeth out into the corridor.

"It's at four o'clock," the latter informed her, "and it's just three-thirty now. We'll have time to drop in at the store for a chocolate bar."

The refreshment secured, they stood consuming each her share of the purchase, in the lower foyer when Sister Angela descended the stairway to them.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" Her attitude toward them with the waning of the scholastic year had become quite friendly and communal. "I'm looking for someone to go on an important message."

"Certainly." Bet smiled her willingness unrefinedly through a bite of chocolate.

"Love to," averred Louise.

Sister Angela entrusted to their care a registered letter which had to be delivered at the villa immediately.

"There's money in it," she said.

"Then goodby to it." Elizabeth waved it back at Sister in cordial jest as she and Lou set out upon their confidential mission.

They walked rapidly through the woodland, and stood

for a moment to gaze at the valley. A delicate bluish haze rested on the distant hills, but the valley itself was fresh and beautiful, and the nearer slopes were a very mass of lovely shimmering tree-tops blossoming white or massed in a thousand subtle demi-tints of green and mauve and crimson and faint yellow.

"It will always be here," fervently remarked Louise.

"Barring earthquakes and such," rejoined Elizabeth with callous matter-of-factness.

"I want to bring Jack up here when he comes."

"Do," exhorted his sister. "You could have a picnic—and invite me and Phil. We could eat the victuals while you and Jack absorb the scenery."

"Phil *ought* to be invited," returned Lou feelingly.

On the way down the hill she adverted appreciatively for the hundredth time to Phil's deliberate and generous collaboration with Aunt Ellie in the conspiracy against Cousin Brenda. The details of that collaboration Louise had gathered partly from Aunt Ellie, partly from Phil, and partly from Jack himself. Jack had transcribed for her in one of his letters Phil's record of his interview with Aunt Ellie on the day after her visit to Lou in the infirmary. Aunt Ellie had called him up the first thing in the morning at his place of business—she had carefully preserved the address—and had requested him to meet her in the lobby of the Forty-second Street Library. "I am a little woman with white hair," she had flutteringly told him, "and for purposes of identification I shall have a violet veil on my hat, and I shall carry a green parasol." Phil, informing her that he would wear a suit of brown, gallantly offered, if she so wished, to make sacrifice of his finer feelings to the extent of marring the ensemble of his appearance with a red tie. She had been reluctant to put him to this inconvenience, urging him only to be sure to announce himself to her as Jack's brother. Hoarded in her memory were the descriptive items furnished by her unsuspecting niece

—his kind mouth, his neutral hair, and his consciousness of a too refined exterior. The interview had been brief but eminently successful, the immediate result of it a letter from Phil to Jack explaining that Lou's aunt was in no way opposed to him, nor were her sentiments on the subject of income at all in accord with those of Cousin Brenda. Phil had told Aunt Ellie that Jack's struggle for wealth in Cuba had no other motive than a desire to establish himself as a financially qualified suitor for the hand of her niece.

"I know for a fact that your chances are O.K. with Louise," Phil had written his brother.

And Jack had tried his luck in the communication which had reached Convent at the end of Elizabeth's novena.

The girls delivered Sister Angela's registered letter at the villa, stopping for a word with the rosy-faced sister who had come to their rescue on that wintry day of their adventurous coasting.

"A lucky day for me, Bet!"

They slowly began their ascent of the hill, but when they had proceeded a short distance, swerved from the main road and turned in to Our Lady's grotto to rest. They sat quietly there on the stone bench for several minutes, Lou looking up at the calm-faced statue, Elizabeth humming irrelevantly, though without irreverence, a snatch from some secular tune.

"Why don't you send him, Mother?" Lou laughed at herself as she asked the question, and turned to meet a heartening smile of sympathy upon Elizabeth's lips.

"I used to come down here to make my novena."

"I know." After a long pause, Lou stood up. "We'll be late for the procession."

"Cousin Brenda would love your fervor."

They halted again halfway up the hill.

"We've got to have some!" Elizabeth pointed them out—great limpid masses of dogwood low against the

trees beyond the meadow at their left. They crossed over, and having filled their arms with the lovely white blossoming boughs, resumed their upward way.

"Dogwood's good luck," laughed Elizabeth.

"Pagan!" Lou reproached her, but laughingly, too.

"It is! Don't you remember Anne? Do you know what she's going to give us for graduation—you and me?"

"Couldn't guess." She had frequently caught herself hoping for a certain definite gift from someone else. Some of the girls' *fathers* gave them gorgeous rings for graduation. She didn't want anything gorgeous—just a—

"She's painting two dear little chocolate sets—one for each of us—with a dogwood berry design. But she doesn't know I saw them. Bob told me they were for us."

"Isn't that sweet of her! And we really didn't treat her so nicely after a while."

"You did."

Thereupon they fell into a argument, protracted and earnest, over their respective attitudes toward her who had lighted for them the shadowed weeks at the beginning of their freshman year. The discussion was abruptly checked when, at the top of the hill, they perceived that the campus was quite deserted. They were evidently late for the procession. They hurried on past O'Connor Hall to Santa Rita, their own dormitory, at the entrance of which they deposited their flowers. A swift dash then along the walk, across the court-yard, and through the cellar passage-way—lovingly known as the "catacombs"—brought them up to the chapel vestibule just in time to fall in at the end of the line.

"We've made it," breathed Elizabeth in a satisfied whisper, "and we can see the whole thing."

This latter advantage Louise thoroughly appreciated, and watched eagerly the long procession of girls, in cap

and gown, moving down under the trees past the chapel, slowly crossing the campus past the greenhouse, past the tennis courts and Santa Rita Hall, and ascending the slope to the shrine of Our Lady of the Woods. The words and music of an old, old hymn—once deemed by her utterly commonplace—floated sweetly back to her now with precious golden significance.

"'Tis the month of our Mother,
The blessed and beautiful days,
When our lips and our spirits
Are glowing with love and with praise.
All hail to dear Mary,
The guardian of our way,
To the fairest of Queens,
Be the fairest of seasons, sweet May!"

"The fairest of seasons!" But May was over! "The guardian of our way." The guardian of his way—please! Louise joined shyly in the prayers of her Catholic fellow collegians up there on that knoll in the woods, but took heart to add a freer voice to the singing of the recessional hymn, the old Latin, "Monstra te esse matrem."

After Benediction, which concluded the ceremonies, she remained in the chapel, kneeling in the first pew of the transept before the Blessed Virgin's altar.

"'Mary, show thyself a mother!'"

Someone stole up beside her and whispered, "You're wanted outside. Hurry!"

Louise rose to go, whispering in return to Elizabeth, for she was the herald—"Aren't you coming, too?"

"No." She slipped into the pew and knelt there. "Not just now. I'm going to say the stations."

"Then it must be—"

"Go quickly," she said, and covered her face with her hands.

Louise hurried down the aisle and out into the vestibule where quite papistically and nervously she dipped

her fingers into the holy water fount and made the sign of the cross. "For strength," she told herself. She pulled open the big screen door, and for a second paused at the topmost of the five broad stone steps. And yes, there, truly—gazing up at her with his frank pleasant smile, and his deep kind eyes, his uncovered hair seeming fairer than ever against his sun-tanned face, stood Jack.

After the play in commencement week, when down on the front campus near the athletic field, she was showing Jack the rock under the oak where she had often sat waiting, happening to glance up toward the terrace, she saw Elizabeth and her mother there in conversation with Addie and a gentleman of distinguished appearance.

"Addie's father!" Louise exclaimed. "And Bet *was* wonderful in the play, and he'll do something for her advancement, and *all* my dreams will come true."

"Dreams?" echoed Jack, scarcely seeing his beloved relatives up on the terrace. "I have something real for you." He opened the little velvet-lined box.

"Oh, it's a dream!" cried Lou in ecstatic delight.

Two minutes later Elizabeth yodeled down to them. They did not hear.

That night at nine Louise called at Elizabeth's room, rejoicing to find her alone.

"What about Addie's father?"

"He was as courteous as a king," was the reply. "He praised my work, and kindly offered to talk to me himself some day about my début into the theatrical world." She grimaced smilingly, but at the same time drew a weary hand across her forehead. "I'm dead tired, and I cried my eyes out after Mother left."

"Why?" Such emotion was unseasonable certainly. "You'll see her to-morrow at the reception, and commencement day, and then all summer—"

"She had to go home alone," murmured Elizabeth feebly. "I felt sorry for her."

"Jack missed the train." There was a prisoner at the bar.

"Oh, no! Not so much that," Elizabeth explained hurriedly. "But somehow or other—oh, I don't know—she didn't mind a bit—I'm not quite sure myself what it was. Nerves, perhaps. I was tired."

Neither spoke for a few minutes. Then Louise asked, mainly to break the embarrassing pause. "When are you going to call on Addie's father?"

"Never, chile."

They were seated opposite each other at Elizabeth's little round-topped wicker table, and she with eyes downcast was mechanically turning the pages of a shabby magazine.

"Never?"

"I didn't ask for an interview." The eyelids rose in a flickering glance, then dropped again. "Mother was so anxious and worried about things."

Louise, resting her chin in her hands and pressing her fingers against her closed eyes, asked quietly, "Is she anxious about Jack? She doesn't seem so friendly toward me as she used to be."

"She loves you, but she *is* anxious, Pollywog. You know the reason Cousin Brenda is opposed to Jack? Well, that's the reason why Mother is anxious about you."

"Oh, because I'm not a Catholic?" The hands came down, and the face brightened with relief immeasurable. "She wouldn't want me to be one just to straighten things out. Jack hasn't talked about it." She went on as if thinking aloud. "Curious that he didn't say something! I might have been considering it all this time—I mean seriously. Of course the idea has passed through my mind occasionally, and it wouldn't be a big step for me, because I was baptized a Catholic. I believe almost

everything you believe—almost everything," she repeated reflectively. "Bet, I know what I can do. I'll study it, and pray over it, and 'go under instructions,' as you say, and then, if I can—sincerely—"

Eager hands crossed the table to meet hers. "You couldn't do more, Louie! You're wonderful, and I'm the happiest thing in the world when I think you're to be my own sister! You know once in a while I used to be sort of jealous of Amy, and I'll never forget the day you had your hair bobbed after you told me you couldn't afford to come to New York with me."

"That third cause for your dejection." Lou laughed as she had more than once of late when they had reviewed this and kindred incidents of their past four years. "And the mocha cake and the caramels—you wouldn't touch a crumb of them!"

They sat there talking for a long time over a thousand things that were making life beautiful for both of them now. But at length Louise rising reluctantly, said, "I'd better go pack. My books are lying round, and my curtains are still up, and to-morrow there won't be an ounce of time. I'm to have a conference in the morning with Sister Margaret. She's going over some parts of my novel with me." She walked slowly toward the door.

"Is it finished? I'm dying to read it!" Elizabeth stood up, too, and knelt with one knee on her chair.

"Not quite finished." The author laughed ruefully. "Sister says if I struggle along with it for a few more years, someone might publish it."

"She's encouraging!"

"Oh, I don't really mind, and anyway it will be something to pick up and play with occasionally. I couldn't finish it now, besides, even if I had time. I'm in a predicament about the ending. I'm not sure of it."

"You ought to have been sure of it," lectured Elizabeth, "before you began. All the text-books say so."

"But my novel is different. It's a transcript of life—"

"Even so—"

"Wait! The heroine has deadlocked the plot."

"Kill her. That would satisfy the realists."

"I like her too much."

"Is she nice?"

"She's you, Bet."

"Me?"

Louise, smiling a wide-stretched smile, nodded, and nodded, and nodded. Elizabeth sank into a chair, and, "Oh, Lou! Oh, Lou!" she exclaimed as, her arms on the table, she pressed her face desperately against them.

"You were to be a famous actress." The author said it stalwartly.

"I'll never be." Muffled though the reply was, it was also unarguably decisive.

"In time—it will take time."

"I mean I'll never be an actress at all." The head was raised and compassionating eyes looked at Lou.

"Why not?"

"Well, because—of course I ought to have told you before—but you were so happy—and I thought you wouldn't quite—quite *get* it—understand, you know. The fact is, Pollywog—" and Elizabeth's lips trembled a bit through her attempt at a smile—"the fact is, I can't be an actress, because I'm going to be a Sister of Charity. I'm coming back in September—"

Louise went suddenly cold. "Bet, you couldn't!" She drew near to the table. "You, Bet? You?"

Elizabeth nodded now in her turn, her brown eyes sparkling and her color heightening with every word of explanation. "I've wanted to for several years—as long as I can remember, in fact. I settled it that night with the president—you know, when I had to go to her about the cigarettes."

"I wish—I wish the convent would burn up!" cried Lou, and dropping tragically into her recently vacated

chair, gave herself abandonedly to weeping. "I wish it would burn up!"

"Louie!" Elizabeth came round behind her, and stood holding the dark bobbed head between affectionate, pitying hands. "I want it, Louie—I want it more than anything else in the world. And Mother isn't preventing me, though we're both almost dead at the idea of parting. She's a saint—my mother. And then she has Margy, and she's going to have you. And I say, Pollywog," she laughed in her old cheerful way, "you wouldn't want me to wish that Jack would burn up or burn down—would you?"

Louise gazed earnestly up at her delinquent heroine and friend in an effort, through brimming eyes, to search her very soul. "Really? Honestly? Do you *really* feel that way about it?"

"Really! Honestly!" Then laughingly again, as she let her hands slip from the dark head to the quivering shoulders, she continued, "I'm horribly sorry I muffed the plot of your novel, hon, but won't it be jolly to have me here at the old place for a while when you come back to visit?"

"I couldn't leave it, Bet," Lou fervently declared, "I *couldn't* if it weren't for Jack!"

"And I couldn't come back to it, Louie," Elizabeth smiled down at her, "*truly* I couldn't, if it weren't for God!"

THE END

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Hillman, Mary V.
AUTHOR
In the Jersey hills
TITLE

St. Mary Regional High School
Library
310 Augusta Street
South Amboy, New Jersey 08879

St. Mary's High School Library

[redacted]

1. All pupils in the school are entitled to use the library and to draw books.

2. Reference books, such as encyclopaedias and dictionaries, are to be used only in the library.

3. Reserved books may be borrowed for one period, or at the close of school, and should be returned before the first class the following school day.

4. All other books may be retained for two weeks.

5. Two cents a day is charged for each book kept overtime.

6. Injury to books beyond reasonable wear and all losses shall be paid for.

7. No books may be taken from the library without being charged.

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St. Mary's High School
The Library
[redacted]

CARDINAL MCCARRICK HIGH SCHOOL
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